

Socialist History 68



Socialist History 68

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Contents

Notes on contributors	4
Women's football in Britain during the 1880s <i>Ariel Hessayon</i>	5
Arthur Creech Jones: the quiet revolutionary and the Labour Party's pre- and post-war policy on African colonial self-government <i>Duncan Bowie</i>	31
Fascism, Free Speech and Academic Freedom: A case study from the 1980s <i>Michael Newman</i>	55
The Rise and Fall and Rise of <i>World Marxist Review</i> Reflections on the past and present journal <i>Helena Sheehan</i>	81
Peasant War, Violence and Revolution <i>Jakub Beneš</i> <i>in conversation with Samuel Foster and Francis King</i>	94
Review article: What was Bolshevism? <i>John Biggart</i>	101
Reviews	108

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Women's football in Britain during the 1880s

Ariel Hessayon

In autumn 1894 a British Ladies' Football Club was established. It flourished until about October 1897. A 'huge throng of ten thousand' gathered at the Nightingale Lane Ground, Crouch End to see the first match on 23 March 1895 between two women's teams called 'North' and 'South'. To quote a contemporary report, 'the idea of woman taking up a sport essentially designed for man' had been the brainchild of Miss Nettie Honeyball.¹ It seems that Honeyball – who served as the club's secretary – saw this as a business opportunity, but was also keen on turning young middle-class women into professional footballers. Honeyball was assisted in her endeavours by Lady Florence Caroline Dixie (1855–1905), who took on the role of non-playing club president. She was the youngest daughter of the eighth marquess of Queensberry and sister of John Sholto Douglas, ninth marquess of Queensberry (whose famous trial, on a charge of libel brought by Oscar Wilde, began less than two weeks later at the Old Bailey). As for Florence, she was the author of *Across Patagonia* (1880) as well as *Gloriana, or, The Revolution of 1900* (1890). Using her privileged background to speak out on a range of topical and social issues – including home rule for Ireland and Scotland; amendment of the divorce laws; family planning; and suitable women's attire – she not only denounced the cruelty of blood sports but also saw the promotion of women's football as one of several stepping stones towards complete sex equality. Thus, given a column in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 February 1895), she declared:

There is no reason why football should not be played by women, and played well, too, provided they dress rationally and relegate to limbo the straight-jacket attire in which fashion delights to clothe them ... I cannot conceive a game more calculated to improve the physique of women than that of [Association] football ... In that school of the future, which, looking ahead, I see arising on the golden hill-tops of progress above the mists of prejudice, football will be considered as natural a game for girls as for boys, as will also cricket, athletics, and all national games, in pursuit of which the hideous fashions which crush women with their barbarous and unnatural rule will receive their severest checks and final dethronement.²

The British Ladies' Football Club has been the subject of a book by James Lee which explored, among other things, how dominant representations of masculinity and femininity were challenged at a moment of social upheaval as well-bred women footballers were afforded the opportunity of donning rational dress and improving their health through vigorous exercise. Another theme was predominantly hostile press coverage which sometimes emphasised troubling questions of gender identity: the North's short-haired tricky left-winger Miss Gilbert, for example, was unkindly nicknamed 'Little Tommy'.³ Robert Lewis has also written a study of female football spectators in Britain from the formation of the Football Association in 1863 until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁴ By comparison, however, until very recently women's football in Britain during the 1880s has received considerably less attention.⁵ So here I want to provide a narrative of developments beginning with the so-called women's 'international' football matches of 1881 and concluding in 1888 with the formation of the men's English Football League.

Using more than 350 digitised newspaper accounts – space does not permit citation of all but a handful – as well as some other sources, the first part of this article reconstructs the games of 1881 and reactions to them in greater detail than has previously been possible. As we shall see, initially the dominant motivation for those involved was money. Seemingly drawn from urban areas and of low social status, several female footballers appear to have been stage performers and may also have adopted pseudonyms. Certainly the athletic physiques of these supposed 'Amazons' were frequently remarked upon, leading to occasional complaints about the masculinisation of women. Their eye-catching, colourful kit, doubtless intended to enhance the spectacle, permitted unencumbered movement. Yet it also caused outrage among moralists aghast that young women could indecently expose themselves in tight-fitting clothing. As for the standard of play, observers generally considered it to be of very low quality; a travesty of the men's game rather than an exciting innovation. The female footballers had minimal preparation, lacked skill, speed, effective teamwork and tactical awareness. As for the umpires, they were reportedly even more ignorant of the rules of Association football than the players. All the same, through a combination of effective publicity and considerable press attention – at least at the outset – matches were attended by large crowds. Because prices were relatively high many spectators succeeded in watching without paying. This resulted in unruly elements attending several fixtures and there were even some unnerving pitch invasions – one of which necessitated a police baton-charge to protect the players. A noticeable number of spectators, moreover, amused themselves at the women's expense, treating them as objects of ridicule. Anxious to avoid the taint of bad publicity, many men's football clubs too swiftly disassociated themselves

from these sporting spectacles. Whether these 'international' matches advanced the cause of women's rights rather than setting them back is therefore debatable.

Part two likewise draws upon several hundred more digitised newspaper accounts. Here it has not been possible to present a single narrative covering the period between July 1881 and April 1887. Rather, the geographical scope has been extended to look at comparable developments in Australia and the United States. Five interlinked strands can be identified. First, there were generally uncomplimentary memories of the 'international' contests which may have partly shaped public attitudes towards subsequent female football games. Second, a ladies' football club was formed in Sussex and perhaps also South Wales. The subject was also discussed facetiously in the Australian press. Third, there was a noticeable female presence at matches of Association and American football as well as Australian rules. Hostile accounts, however, criticised some female spectators for their vulgarity and, in one instance, threatening behaviour towards a referee. Others were upbraided for using sporting occasions as an opportunity to invite appreciative male gazes and engage in flirtation. There were even occasional sexual liaisons with players. Fourth, a couple of women's football matches were linked to village communal celebrations, while there was also an apparent example of participation in traditional folk football. Fifth, in one sense, there was a reprise of the original 'international' fixtures with matches in spring 1887 between women's teams representing Edinburgh and Grimsby. Cumulatively this indicates that female football culture – whether as players or spectators – was more widespread, varied and resilient than the 1881 matches alone might suggest. Significantly, the issue of women's rights can also sometimes be discerned running through these interlinked strands.

I. Women's 'international' football matches, 1881

In March 1881 there was a men's international football match played between England and Scotland at the Kennington Oval (London) which was attended by an estimated crowd of 4,000–5,000 spectators. The Scots were victorious 6-1. Afterwards someone described as 'an enterprising advertising agent' looked to cash in by staging an equivalent women's fixture. Accordingly, two teams were assembled for the 'purpose of popularising football as a feminine pastime' and, it was stressed, financial gain. Those representing England were said to originate mainly from London while their Scottish counterparts apparently came mostly from Glasgow. Even so, it was hinted that their nationalities may not have been given in good faith. All of them were estimated to be aged between 18 and 24, the majority described as 'well-built, athletic-looking girls'. Their physique was explained in some accounts as a consequence of many being ballet dancers and the like. The *Liverpool Echo* even referred to them as 'a female football troupe'.⁶

In addition, there was speculation as to their true identity, with several newspapers commenting upon the 'simple', 'splendid' or 'romantic' nature of the players' names.⁷ Nevertheless, preparation was minimal – reportedly no more than a fortnight. Although it was rumoured that a couple of well-known male players belonging to a leading Glasgow club had been approached to coach the women, reportedly 'nobody would have anything to do with the matter'. So instead both teams trained indoors, practising their dribbling in 'a certain drill hall' close to Glasgow Cross.⁸ Although several reports suggested that the English team had never played outdoors, together with their Scottish opponents they had 'a full dress rehearsal' in a field in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park (Glasgow) the day prior to their debut.

While both sides had familiarised themselves with the laws of the game, the same could not be said of the two umpires: Mr G. F. Charles of London (for the English team) and Mr Alec Gordon of Edinburgh (for the Scottish team). Given their ignorance of Football Association rules, they may well have been part of the show. This has prompted speculation as to their identities and the nature of their involvement. According to several newspaper reports there was a G. F. Charles, who for many years was the lessee and manager of the Theatre Royal, St Helens. This G. F. Charles, however, was actually an alias of George Imbert (c.1822–1891). Imbert alias Charles was an acquaintance of Charles Scholes (c.1831–1883), alias Charles Henry Duval of Blackburn. Scholes alias Duval was likewise the lessee and manager of several theatres in Lancashire. He had been declared bankrupt in 1870 and in June 1880 a petition was filed for the liquidation of his affairs. Scholes's liabilities were estimated at £2,500 and the stage effects and scenery at St Helens were auctioned to pay his creditors. Whether following the collapse of Scholes's business Imbert/Charles together with Gordon hit upon the idea of women's football as a money-making scheme is difficult to say. Assuming that the umpire G. F. Charles was not a namesake but one and the same as the theatre manager, then he would have been nearly 60 at the time. Moreover, Imbert/Charles can be placed at St Helens between January 1878 and January 1881, and then again from October 1881 – but not, to my knowledge, in the spring and summer of 1881 when the women's football matches took place in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lancashire and Yorkshire. In short, the involvement of Imbert/Charles and his associates in this business is an intriguing if as yet unproven suggestion.

7 May. Hibernian Park, Edinburgh: Scotland 3–0 England

Several Glasgow clubs were approached as a potential venue. None granted it, however, with the possible exception of Rangers F.C., whose ground at Kinning Park was to have hosted the fixture. That is, until a drawn charity game was replayed there instead.⁹ As a consequence, Edinburgh not Glasgow became the

stage for the first women's 'international' football match. The 90-minute contest was played according to Football Association rules at Hibernian Park, Easter Road on Saturday, 7 May 1881. Attendance for this 'athletic novelty' was estimated at about 2,000 people, although with 'hardly any ladies present'.¹⁰ As a gimmick, the players arrived shortly after 3.00 pm in an omnibus drawn by four horses. They were colourfully dressed in kit 'essentially similar to that worn by male football players'. Both teams of eleven ladies were provided with woollen cowls (not unlike hooded tops); blue and white for the Scots, crimson and white for the English. The Scottish players wore blue jerseys with a crimson waist sash and a lion rampant badge on the breast. Their English opponents wore crimson jerseys with a blue waist sash and a badge featuring two Union Jacks.¹¹ In addition, both teams wore knickerbockers; hose (blue and white for the Scots; crimson and white for the English); and high-heeled boots.¹² Kick-off was about 3.30 pm with the match split into two 45-minute halves. Both sides lined up with a goalkeeper, two backs, two half-backs and six forwards.¹³ The ball was made of leather.

Playing against the wind in the first half and with the advantage of it in the second, the supposed Scotswomen won 3-0 (goalscorers: Miss Lilly St Clair; Miss Louise Cole; Miss Maud Riverford). Bella Oswald (Scotland) and Maud Hopewell (England) were said to have played well along with some of the forwards, while Isa Stevenson set up the last goal. Yet this 'mild kind of football' was not an entirely gentle affair. Although there was 'an appearance of bashfulness and hesitancy' at the outset, the two teams soon began playing 'with all the enthusiasm of boys'. Besides running and dribbling, there were also some rough passages of play, 'frequent scrimmages' and 'a tumble or two'. Even so, sections of the crowd made 'sarcastic or personal remarks', loudly guffawing at the standard of play which, except for some frantic goalmouth action, was noticeably slow. These rowdy elements also criticised the appearance of the players – some of whom had 'retained such feminine ornaments as frillings, bracelets, &c.', although others had their arms bare to the shoulders. There was also amusement when these 'Amazonian maids', to quote the *Carlisle Express*, began shrieking whenever there was danger of conceding a goal. Before the end, more than half the spectators had gone – reportedly either with their curiosity satisfied or else in disgust.

Press coverage was largely hostile. *Bell's Life* judged the standard of football to be 'of the most primitive order'. The *Dundee Courier* called it 'a most disappointing spectacle'. The *Glasgow Herald* considered it 'a failure'. The *Scotsman* declared it 'a most unfeminine exhibition', while the *Weston Mercury* declared it a 'senseless, shameless parody on manly sport'. So too the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, which pronounced it 'infinitely worse' than a recent burlesque on the national summer sport by a team of 'clown cricketers'. Moreover, the *Glasgow*

Evening News thought it neither sporting to witness women getting 'violently knocked about a field' nor particularly healthy – 'either physically or morally'. The *Aberdeen Evening Express* was equally condemnatory, lamenting that young ladies should make 'a spectacle for the vulgar' by publicly displaying themselves 'in a semi-nude condition'. Similarly, the *Glasgow News* worried about the impact of this 'outrageous exhibition' on public morals. The *Jedburgh Gazette* was equally unequivocal: this was 'women's rights with a vengeance' and such 'pretensions to public notoriety' had no place in Scotland. The *Aberdeen Journal* on the other hand, praised the young women's 'excellent physique' and thought their 'somewhat fantastic costumes' made the scene 'very charming and effective'.

16 May. Shawfield Recreation Grounds, Glasgow: Scotland 0–0 England (match abandoned)

After the Edinburgh show another performance was planned at Dumbarton on Thursday, 12 May. But there is no indication that this took place. So on the evening of Monday, 16 May a second fixture was played at Shawfield Recreation Grounds, on the banks of the River Clyde near Rutherglen Bridge in Glasgow. Mainly used as a running and horse-trotting venue, it had been secured as a last resort by the match promoter because the members of all the city's major football clubs had refused to allow their pitches to be used for such an 'unseemly exhibition'. Ahead of the game several newspapers carried advertisements for this 'Grand International Football Match' featuring 'Lady Players'. As a consequence of this publicity by 7 pm Rutherglen Bridge was lined with a large crowd, mostly people from Bridgeton and Saltmarket. Reportedly, more than 3,000 mostly 'rowdy' male spectators attended. Indeed, few were of the 'class' that normally patronised the game. Hundreds more got in without paying.¹⁴ Admission was one shilling; double the normal price for watching a men's match. Once again the teams were paraded onto the field in an omnibus. The line-ups were unchanged and presumably the players were kitted out the same as before.¹⁵

Play began about 7.30 pm and was soon accompanied by sounds of laughter, joking, cheering, occasional hooting and swearing as well as shouts of 'Go it, Fanny' and 'Well done, Nelly'. Indeed, the match was described as 'a very tame affair'. It was also abandoned, scoreless, after fifty-five minutes following a pitch invasion – the ropes keeping back the crowd were cut, whereupon the 'rougher elements' rushed onto the field. The players were 'roughly jostled' and 'rather badly treated by the mob'. One, or perhaps as many as four, reportedly fainted. They were saved from potentially serious injury after police came to their rescue, baton-charging the 'infuriated ruffians'. Thereupon the players retreated to the omnibus which was then driven rapidly from the ground by a team of four grey horses while the crowd jeered and hurled wooden stakes at them.¹⁶ Outside the ground local girls from the Bridgeton mills joined in the chorus of derision. As

the omnibus crossed over Rutherglen Bridge some hooligans attempted to drag the players from their vehicle. But they were prevented by a number of onlookers (there were too few policemen present, who were 'powerless to quell the disturbance').

Unsurprisingly, this 'disgraceful scene' prompted a great deal of further press hostility. *Bell's Life* bemoaned the players' 'utmost ignorance of the game', not to mention the 'umpiring', which was 'even more ignorant of the simple rudiments of the Association rules'. Hence there was encroachment at throw-ins. Nor were there any corner kicks, despite the defending side repeatedly sending the ball behind the goal line. There was also criticism of the players' lack of ball control and tactical awareness. The *Glasgow Herald* deemed the standard of play 'most amateurish', while the *Greenock Telegraph* called it 'a pure farce from beginning to end'. The *Warfedale and Airedale Observer* went further, opining that these 'enterprising "merry maidens"' must have learned from their unfortunate experience in Glasgow that there was insufficient appetite among the British public for 'female football matches' and that, as yet, these exhibitions were not suitable for making money. Similarly, the *Paisley Daily Express* declared that the football field was 'not the place for the fair sex except as spectators'. Indeed it was:

against our chivalric notions that such creatures should expose their dainty limbs to the gaze of the vulgar crowd, and be seen kicking and sprawling about like so many windmills gone mad.

For its part, the *Sheffield Independent* wished that the female players – if they had the 'slightest trait of womanly modesty' – would not perform again in public. In the same vein, the *John o' Groat Journal* declared that respectable people would not go near women disgracefully dressed in 'ordinary male football costume'. Likewise, the *Ulster Examiner* denounced it as a 'sad', 'humiliating', 'shocking and disgusting sight' that should not be repeated. Accordingly, it expressed the hope that 'the evil example which the immoral Scotch have just exhibited will find no imitators'. Turning to the *Dundee Courier*, it maintained that 'the doctrine of women's rights is not to be recognised as including the right to appear in public places in knickerbocker suits for the purpose of playing football'. Furthermore, a football match played by women was not merely an oddity but an objectionable and potentially indecent spectacle. As such 'it ought to be suppressed' by the police. This sentiment, however, was not universal for another Dundee correspondent defended the right of women to play whatever lawful game they wished – including football. For good measure, this person rebuked the spectators for their 'unmanliness and want of self-respect' which was 'altogether unworthy of the name of Scotchmen'.

17 May. Hamilton Park, Kilmarnock: match cancelled

The next day the female footballers intended to go and play at Hamilton Park, the ground of Kilmarnock Portland F.C. (1873–1883). A crowd gathered outside, ‘expecting to see the Amazons’. But they did not appear. This was because on the recommendation of the magistrates the club withdrew their permission, so as to avoid ‘scandal’. Almost at the last minute ‘bills were circulated stating that the match had been postponed’. The teams’ managers were also telegraphed with a message that seemed to spell the end for women’s ‘international’ football north of the border.

Once again press coverage was overwhelmingly condemnatory. Reportedly the proposed match at Kilmarnock had been looked upon with ‘considerable disfavour by the public’ and no football club ‘with any regard for their good name’ wanted to be associated with such a ‘humiliating spectacle’. Furthermore, the *Irvine Times* was thankful that ‘an insult to womanly modesty’ and ‘a disgrace to the national pastime’ had been avoided. Similarly, the *Birmingham Mail* advised the ‘muscular young ladies’ to give up their ‘project’ since they had little hope of ‘enlisting public sympathy’ south of the River Tweed. But like the *Sheffield Independent*, which thought it probable that ‘nothing more would be heard of the gyrations of the Amazonian football players’, it was wrong. For the show continued in Blackburn, Lancashire.

21 May. Hole-i’-th’wall, Blackburn: England 1–0 Scotland

On Saturday afternoon, 21 May some 4,000 spectators turned out in fine weather at the ‘Hole-i’-th’wall’ ground of Blackburn Olympic Football Club to watch another women’s fixture of ‘England’ v ‘Scotland’.¹⁷ This time it was reported that all the players came from Glasgow, which was fortunate since it meant they could not understand the broad Lancashire accents of the spectators who teased them mercilessly. After two goals had been disallowed and with just a few minutes remaining, there was ‘an exciting scrimmage in front of the Scotch posts’ from which the English scored the winning goal. According to *The Manchester Guardian*, however, there was little effective teamwork with each player ‘striving to kick the ball’ as the opportunity arose. The *Blackburn Standard* said much the same: ‘there were no half-backs or any halves whatever about the game, each lady being in full possession of her position, and playing her own game whenever she got the chance, without much regard to the result’.

As before, in addition to commenting upon the game several newspapers raised issues of public decency and women’s rights. The *Newry Reporter* decried the ‘masculinisation’ of women and thought it ‘quite revolting’ that the ‘well-built’ ladies wore tight-fitting clothes, while the *Saturday Review* sarcastically suggested that the recently founded ‘Rational Dress Society’ could borrow hints

from the players' costume. Regarding women's rights, the *Rhyl Record* opined that there 'can be no doubt as to the desirability of the physical as well as the moral and intellectual development of the female portion of the community'. But it questioned the wisdom of publicly playing women's football as a way of achieving this.

28 May. Fairfield Athletic Grounds, Liverpool: match cancelled

30 May. Queen's Grounds, Sheffield: England 2–1 Scotland

Staying in Lancashire, the lady footballers travelled from Blackburn to Liverpool. Here another match was advertised the following Saturday, 28 May at Fairfield Athletic Grounds. Kick-off was scheduled for 3.30 pm. But after nearly two hours' waiting the expectant crowd gradually dispersed because neither team showed up. No explanation was provided for the abrupt cancellation. Instead, the players went to Manchester where they searched fruitlessly for a pitch. Afterwards they travelled to Sheffield to play at the Queen's Grounds, Hillsborough – usually a running venue – on Monday, 30 May with a 6.00 pm kick-off. Nearly 1,000 spectators watched this 'football farce', which the 'English' won 2–1.

3 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool: England 1–1 Scotland

Thereafter the lady footballers returned to Liverpool, where they secured the Stanley Athletic Grounds on the outskirts of the city for an evening fixture. This game was played on Friday, 3 June with a 7.30 pm kick-off. *Athletic News* provided a detailed report. The match was 'well contested' with some of the players showing 'remarkably good form'. In particular, the English goalkeeper was praised for her shot-stopping, while several of the forwards were also commended for their dribbling and making 'splendid runs'. It ended 1–1 (goalscorers: Miss Eva Davenport for England, Miss Louise Cole for Scotland). Altogether it was judged 'a great success', although the attendance was smaller than expected.

6 June. Halifax: score unknown

From Liverpool the lady footballers went back to Manchester. There during the Whitsuntide holiday period, that is between 5–7 June, they arranged to play three more 'international' fixtures at Salford F.C.'s ground. But unfortunately 'their guide and cashier bolted with all the money that was left in the treasury'. Lacking any spare cash to pay the farmer in Salford to whom the ground belonged and who demanded advance payment of rent, the lady footballers were forced to

abandon these matches. So on Monday, 6 June they journeyed just over 30 miles to Halifax, where they played on the Free Wanderers' ground (a local rugby team). This 'rather novel spectacle' attracted a large crowd, although the proceedings were 'of a somewhat tame character'. As in previous matches, the players were sometimes subjected to ridicule. But the score in this game is unknown.

13 June. Windhill, Bradford: England 2–3 Scotland

A few days later they were reportedly in Leeds, although it is unclear whether this was to play or publicise a fixture. Then on 13 June this 'not altogether prepossessing band of females' travelled by train from Manchester to Bradford for a Monday evening kick-off at Windhill. There a large crowd turned out to see the 'Amazonian leather hunters'. The game itself was 'well played' and lasted more than an hour, with nothing that could cause any great objection. Indeed, the spectators were not rude but boisterous, occasionally laughing but more often 'uproariously' cheering as Scotland beat England 3-2.

20 June. Cheetham F.C., Manchester: England 0–0 Scotland (match abandoned)

21 June. Cheetham F.C., Manchester: England 0–0 Scotland (match abandoned)

The following Monday evening, 20 June the female footballers put in another appearance, this time at Cheetham Football Club, Tetlow Fold in Manchester. This match, together with a further two fixtures on consecutive days, had been advertised on placards around the city. As a result there was a large crowd, with many managing to evade paying an admission fee of one or two shillings. Kick-off had been scheduled for 7.30 pm but the teams arrived about half an hour late. After about 30 minutes of 'indifferent play' there was a pitch invasion and the fixture abandoned. The next day a second game took place at the same venue. As before, very few among another large crowd paid for admission. Many of these spectators gathered either on the road or else on high ground on the other side of the field so as to view proceedings. This time, however, there was a large police presence to maintain order. They succeeded for about an hour before those occupying the 'higher land' rushed onto the pitch. At which point the players, mindful of the rough treatment they had experienced elsewhere in the country, hastily retreated to a waggonette that had transported them to the ground. Condemning the 'disorderly scene', *The Manchester Guardian* blamed the young women footballers for gratifying the 'vulgar curiosity' of uncouth youths by kicking a ball about the field in unbecoming attire. For good measure, Cheetham F.C. publicly distanced itself from the spectacle, with a letter from the club secretary published in the *Manchester Courier*.

**25 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool:
England 1–2 Scotland**

**27 June. Stanley Athletic Grounds, Liverpool:
England 0–2 Scotland**

Undeterred, the women footballers went from Manchester to Liverpool to play two scheduled matches at the Cattle Market Inn Athletic Grounds in Stanley on Saturday, 25 June and Monday, 27 June. Tickets were priced at one shilling. Failure to fulfil their fixture on 28 May combined with the costly admission fee likely put off many from coming. So only a small crowd watched 'Scotland' dominate their opponents, winning the first encounter by two goals to one. Curiously the *Manchester Evening News* added that the Scottish team 'succeeded in making several touchdowns'. A larger number of cheering spectators attended the next fixture, a 'very spirited' contest in which the Scots triumphed over the plucky 'English' 2-0. A third match at the same Liverpool venue was announced for Tuesday, 28 June with a 7.30 pm kick-off. Yet there is no indication that it was played. This may have been because the women footballers were reportedly the victims of theft: according to the *Leeds Mercury* a gatekeeper tasked with collecting admission fees had made off with 'all their hard cash'. The same newspaper concluded with the hope that this 'calamity' would have the effect of 'sending these females, who have been so eager to unsex themselves' back to their homes.

What happened to these lady footballers afterwards is unclear. Certainly there are no more match reports. Rather it was said that two or three English grounds had rescinded their permission for these 'damsels to exhibit their unfeminine powers'. Moreover, negotiations to hire London grounds had proved 'wholly unsuccessful'. At the end of July the *Aberdeen Evening Express* recoiled from the prospect of a cricket match between schoolgirls in Birmingham by recalling:

with what bitter contempt the public and press treated not long ago the promoters of the female football tournaments at Edinburgh and elsewhere, and how the feelings even of those who were most likely to tolerate the vile exhibition revolted against the unusual and unseemly exhibition.¹⁸

Prejudice had won. Women's football did not become 'a national institution' – at least in the short term.

Commentary

Clearly, as a number of contemporary newspapers intimated, money was the main reason for playing women's football in 1881. This was frowned upon since during this period gentleman amateurs embodying the 'Corinthian Spirit' were resisting the increasing professionalisation of sport – including football. As for the female players, they were likely recruited because of their suitable physiques and many may also have been professional performers on stage. Moreover, besides the managers (who may have doubled up as umpires) there was also a match promoter. Indeed, games were publicised through an assortment of techniques including small advertisements in newspapers and placards. There was even a photograph of the 'female football players' team' available from a Glasgow company with premises on Sauchiehall Street.¹⁹ High ticket prices and reported thefts of the match takings on two occasions reinforce the financial motivation of all involved as well as the female performers' vulnerability to opportunistic stealing. Yet as contemporary newspapers also remarked, albeit disapprovingly on the whole, the lady footballers were seen as advancing the cause of women's rights. Here advocates for equality had to contend with prevailing views as to what constituted femininity and masculinity. Tied up with this were deep-seated notions regarding appropriate physical exercise for girls and women, which varied according to social class. Anticipating a notice in *The British Medical Journal* (1894) regarding the possibility of sustaining injuries to the breasts that would prevent the nurturing of infants, there was even concern for the players' physical well-being. As far away as Boston, Massachusetts a correspondent wrote that football, with its 'violent scrimmages', was 'too rough a game for girls to indulge in'.²⁰ A further dimension was religion. Muscular Christianity – exemplified by patriotism, self-sacrifice and athleticism – was all very well for men. But was it suitable for women too?

Turning to where matches were played or scheduled, these were well-chosen locations. Indeed, Scotland (Edinburgh, Dumbarton, Glasgow, Kilmarnock), Lancashire (Blackburn, Liverpool, Manchester) and Yorkshire (Sheffield, Halifax, Bradford) were then the heartlands of football. So much so that when the English Football League was founded seven years later in April 1888, six of the twelve clubs were from Lancashire, with the other six from the Midlands. As for the social composition of the crowds who attended, those who got in without paying seem to have been of a lower social status than the usual spectator at a men's match. This was a point made by a number of contemporary journalists who, together with the bulk of their readers, doubtless looked down upon people they considered their social inferiors. Yet it must be emphasised that the rowdy scenes at several of the women's matches (three were abandoned because of pitch invasions) were not unique for the period. For as one historian has

commented, 'riots, unruly behaviour, violence, assault and vandalism appear to have been a well-established, but not necessarily dominant pattern of crowd behaviour at football matches at least from the 1870s'.²¹

Afterlives

Charles Scholes, alias Charles Henry Duval, theatrical manager, died at Blackburn on 5 February 1883 owing money to various creditors. George Imbert, alias G. F. Charles, theatrical lessee and manager, followed him to the grave at Blackburn on 8 May 1891. As for Lilly St Clair, scorer of the first 'international' goal in a women's football match, someone using that name performed as a singer at the 'Palace of Varieties' in Bethnal Green, London in October 1882. Miss Lilly St Clair, 'Burlesque Vocalist', also performed at the 'Amphitheatre', Portsmouth in February 1885. Yet Lilly St Clair was also one of a number of aliases used by Lilly Cohen (others included Tottie Fay, Lillian Rothschild and Violet St John). Aged 30 in 1887, this woman was frequently in trouble with the London police for drunkenness, disorderly conduct, using obscene language and perjury. At one of her many court appearances in May 1892 (by then she had been charged more than thirty times at one court alone), Lilly appeared in a 'peculiar' costume. 'On her breast were four large silver-plated balls', about the 'size of small oranges'. They were said to be "badges of honour". Did they represent footballs?

What became of the other female footballers is largely unknown, although Stuart Gibbs has outlined the biography of Constance Cole, alias Louise Cole, second goalscorer at Easter Road in May 1881.²² Given their social status, gender and likely precarious financial situation, it will require a great deal of detective work to piece together fragments of these footballers' lives beyond whatever appearances they may have made on stage as well as on the pitch. Nonetheless, as we shall see, there is sufficient surviving evidence to partially fill the previously missing gap in accounts of women's involvement with football in Britain and beyond between July 1881 and April 1887.

II. Women's football, July 1881 to April 1887

Recollections of women's 'international' football and ladies' football clubs

Although women's 'international' football came to an abrupt end in late June 1881, the matches were not entirely forgotten. For despite these performances becoming the butt of jokes, in March 1882 an advertisement was placed in a

theatrical newspaper asking the female football players to make contact. There were also occasional references in the press recollecting the dates and locations of certain matches, not to mention the 'ferocious bullies' who had disrupted the game at Glasgow on 16 May 1881. These 'rowdies' had caused a breach of the peace without caring a fig for the 'unseemly' show:

They broke the palings of the enclosure, they assaulted the doorkeepers, tried to get at the cash box, and mobbed, hustled, and injured the women.²³

Unsurprisingly, the tour of Scotland and northern England by a 'professional team' of lady footballers was therefore remembered as an unsuccessful venture, indeed as a 'disgraceful gate money exhibition', 'unedifying spectacle', 'burlesque' or 'fiasco'.²⁴ In the same vein, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* recalled 'the experiment of organising a team of female football players, which ... was so repulsive to good taste, and met with such emphatic denunciation on all sides, that it was soon abandoned'.²⁵

Just over two years later, in August 1884, the *Naracoorte Herald* (South Australia) observed that 'in this age of women's rights there are lady footballers'. Musing on the prospect of female footballers in every town, it provided sketches of two women playing in a fictitious match between Giggleton and Stayville Rise. One was depicted as angered by an unfavourable umpiring decision. But in an attempt at humour, the journalist supposed that when the game was over she would soon get 'peaceable and kissable'.²⁶

Staying in Australia, as early as May 1862 the *Tarrangower Times* (Maldon, Victoria) had printed a facetious letter to the editor concerning a 'Ladies' Football Association'. Poking fun at the recently formed gentleman's football club in Maldon, which permitted no pushing, tripping or kicking an opponent, it asked to 'give us girls a chance for a good romp in the open air' since this courteous type of football was intended to be 'a very lady-like game'.²⁷ Some eighteen years later, in August 1880, it was reported that a large number of young ladies in Sandhurst, Victoria had recently received initialled postcards inviting them to attend a meeting 'for the purpose of forming a ladies' football club'. Not enough invitees, however, attended this gathering at which it was decided that the idea of a 'team of lady footballers' was 'a little too advanced'.²⁸ So the matter was dropped. Yet within a couple of years an unspecified inland town claimed the 'glory of producing the first Female Football Club' in Australia.²⁹

Nor was this an isolated innovation for as early as autumn 1874 female students at Vassar College, New York reportedly played football – although which form of the game is unclear from a flippant remark that it was 'an inspiring sight to see one of them miss the ball and land on her head in the grass'.³⁰ Perhaps this prompted increased feminine interest, for several months later it was reported that 'Female football clubs' were the 'newest thing' in America.³¹

Whether this account was meant seriously, however, is difficult to say since it is doubtless connected with a tongue-in-cheek story in June 1875 that a match at St Louis had been arranged between twelve brunette lawyers and a similar number of 'blonde damsels' belonging to the same profession.³² But what is certain is that a number of the 'fair sex' attended the opening game of the college football season between Princeton and Harvard in autumn 1877.

Across the Atlantic, at the beginning of January 1880 it was said that a ladies' football club had been established in England. Rumour of such a venture doubtless circulated, for the pseudonymous authors of a satirical publication associated with the magazine *Judy* insisted that 'somewhere or other' there were doubtless 'maids' of merry England frolicking and gambolling about in 'rapturous enjoyment of the football pastime'. Indeed, they mockingly continued, 'muscular, lithe yet fascinating, flannel-clad, football-playing damsels *must* exist'.³³ These jibes became reality in autumn 1886 when, after a successful summer season of women's cricket, a 'ladies' football team' began 'astonishing' the inhabitants of Burgess Hill, Sussex.³⁴ Their intention, reportedly, was to begin by playing matches among themselves before 'challenging ladies' teams from afar off to kick the festive football'.³⁵ As to their prospective opponents, although the *Barrow Herald* said there were none to be found in their town, there was reason to believe that a ladies' football club was being formed in South Wales.³⁶ For the *Buckinghamshire Advertiser* the notion of picturesque 'Amazonian teams on the war-path' was undoubtedly 'a sign of the times', even if it might be some while before every town and village boasted their own Ladies' football club.³⁷ Nonetheless, some journalists belittled this 'latest craze', remarking that it was undecided whether the 'fair Amazons' were to 'play under Rugby or Association rules'.³⁸ Others, however, linked this 'latest startling novelty' to the issue of women's rights on the principle that 'what is good for man is good for woman'. Ultimately such societal trends would bring about 'a perfection of things that there shall be at last no difference whatever between the two sexes'.³⁹ But in the meantime there were practical considerations: could young ladies of limited financial means afford football boots in addition to maintaining a respectable appearance in society?⁴⁰

'Fair sex' spectators

Besides forming female football clubs, women also attended men's matches. As far back as May 1859 'lots of ladies' had attended a couple of matches between Sheffield F.C. (the world's first football club) and the local army garrison.⁴¹ Again, in March 1873 a 'great number' of ladies were among the 5,000 or so spectators that braved the elements to watch Sheffield triumph against London.⁴² So it is unsurprising that the president of a Dundee boys' club voiced his

preference for local girls to take a greater interest in the game by watching it rather than playing.

Sometimes women were admitted free of charge (particularly to the terraces rather than the grandstands), while men normally paid between threepence and sixpence in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁴³ This was often the case not only for football but also for rugby matches in South Wales and West Yorkshire. Yet it was not always so. For at Bramall Lane, Sheffield in January 1879 a parsimonious 'admirer of athletic sports' was astonished to discover that he had to pay admission not only for himself but for his wife and young children as well.⁴⁴ On another occasion, however, namely at Annbank, Ayrshire in 1882, the policy of 'Ladies Free' backfired, for it precipitated an influx of 'slovenly-looking, petticoated, and extremely vulgar' women who swore profusely.⁴⁵ Similarly, in January 1884 when Preston North End played at Great Lever (near Bolton) the referee was abused and threatened by a section of home supporters for appearing to favour the away team. After the match he recalled in a letter to a friend:

I was tackled by a flock of infuriated beings in petticoats supposed to be women, who without doubt were in some cases mothers ... They brandished their umbrellas and shook their fists in my face ... Before I had got away ... a female struck me on the back with her gingham ... I then was struck on the right shoulder by a clinker, when some gentlemen came to my rescue.⁴⁶

That same year in Horbury, Yorkshire a visiting team from Batley were, to quote a modern historian, 'pelted with red-hot coals by a woman' after defeating their hosts.⁴⁷ All the same, as a correspondent for the *Bradford Daily Telegraph* maintained, it would have been a 'mistake to abolish the privilege of free admittance to ladies entirely'. Indeed, he suggested that their presence as spectators would incentivise the male players to 'distinguish themselves' on the pitch.⁴⁸ An English mother living in Ballarat, Victoria took the notion further. Writing to the local newspaper in September 1883, she suggested that just as the 'presence of females incited combatants to victory or death' in the Roman gladiatorial arena, so ladies attending 'half-civilised' games of football would goad the players into 'a reckless state of excitement' and, ultimately, violent conduct.⁴⁹ By contrast, in a column on 'Football Enthusiasts' a writer for the *Cardiff Times* focussed on the reason why so many ladies attended football matches. Jokingly, he accounted for their presence either as an opportunity to engage in public display during the winter months or, alternatively, for those who had been jilted, as a way to vent their spleen by watching men knock each other about.⁵⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed by a sketch writer for the *Weekly Times* in July 1886 concerning certain female spectators at a 20-a-side three-hour Australian football match played at Melbourne cricket ground. Hence one tall, 'stately-looking' lady had come not so much to see as to be seen. Indeed, among the 'galaxy of beauty'

on show were several 'belles in tailor-made gowns' engaged in 'mild flirtations' with their 'numerous gentlemen acquaintances'.⁵¹

Whatever the motivation, there is plenty of evidence that lots of women watched professional fixtures in Lancashire during the early 1880s. Thus a 'number of fair sex spectators' usually attended Blackburn Rovers' home fixtures 'in great force' on big match days.⁵² Moreover, at an F.A. Cup tie played between Preston North End and Upton Park in January 1884, a local journalist reported that spotted among the 12,000-plus crowd at Deepdale were:

slim-waisted girls as fresh as daisies, and sprightly and full of life and vivacity ... adorned here and there with bright flowers, but, whether or not, exercising a wonderful effect wherever they turn in reviving seedy spirits.⁵³

Following the tacit introduction of professional football – formally recognised in July 1885 – Preston North End scrapped free admittance for women after about 2,000 turned up for an Easter Monday game. The policy no longer made economic sense. Nonetheless, it has been estimated that during this period between 5–10% of the crowd at run-of-the-mill professional matches were female, with more still coming to watch local derbies and important cup ties.⁵⁴

For some women, however, watching did not suffice. Indeed, in a handful of cases they crossed the boundaries of decorum by flirting or even having sexual relationships with male players. Thus there are reports in 1886 of a junior Glasgow team getting drunk after a game in Oban and chatting up 'unsuspecting Highland barmaids'.⁵⁵ A few years later it was even alleged that in Glasgow's Southside the pavilions of certain football clubs were being used as brothels, with some members 'letting themselves and young women in by means of pass-keys at untimely hours for improper purposes'.⁵⁶ Although the matter was dropped for lack of evidence, before the turn of the century two Celtic players were separately pursued in the courts for damages on the charge of seducing women – in one case reneging on the promise of marriage.⁵⁷

Female players

But ultimately for a few determined young women there was no substitute for playing. Thus three females and a male sibling played football together on a street in Chester. The ball, however, hit a neighbour's window, resulting in 'wordy warfare'.⁵⁸ More orderly was a woman's football match in May 1886, which concluded the annual village tea party at South Littleton, Worcestershire. Similarly, at Duffield, Derbyshire in June 1887 the jubilee festivities celebrating Queen Victoria's reign featured a 'football contest for women'.⁵⁹ Elsewhere in Derbyshire, at Ashbourne, the famous folk football match played on Shrove

Tuesday and Ash Wednesday in February 1885 was witnessed by a 'very large number of the gentler sex'. This prompted a local journalist to remark that it was a 'great mistake' that a Ladies' ball had not been provided for their 'special amusement':

No doubt some first-rate play would be witnessed, as some of them now can be seen in the thickest of the fight having a kick, as well as encouraging the men to 'go in' and play for their respective sides.⁶⁰

One of the longest descriptions of women's football during this period concerns a game supposedly played at Lanarkshire in November 1885. It claimed to be 'no fancy sketch', but rather a genuine eye-witness account of a 'stirring contest' between brawny-looking mill-workers and the like.⁶¹ There are too many resonances, however, with reports of the 1881 women's 'international' matches to believe it a completely 'veracious narrative'. Nonetheless, since several newspapers reprinted it either in its entirety or in summary, it merits discussion because it evidently reflected widespread contemporary attitudes. According to the author, the match was played 'not for love but lucre', with spectators charged sixpence. Yet the pitch – a field lent for the occasion – was in a 'sloppy state' and the weather inclement. The teams were kitted out in knickerbockers and jerseys, one wearing 'Red and White', their opponents 'Blue and Yellow'. Even so, it was only ten-a-side, each team being a woman short. As for the game itself, it was 'a very fast one', featuring scrimmages, charging, corner kicks, 'pretty' dribbling, 'beautiful' running, 'excellent' passing, heading, tussles, foul play and face scratching. There was also shooting in the wrong direction, sitting on the ball, running aimlessly without it, not to mention a disallowed goal which resulted in the umpire being removed from the ground. With fifteen minutes remaining, the score at 1-0 to the 'Blue and Yellow', and most of the players 'red with heat, white with passion, blue with dismay, or yellow with jealousy', the match was abandoned following a pitch invasion. The unfortunate 'combatants' were roughly treated by the excited spectators and borne off to the pavilion in 'a fit of manly indignation', forcing the local authorities to intervene by putting a stop to future fixtures.⁶²

Within a couple of years several charity matches were played between 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen': at Fleetwood (Lancashire) for the benefit of Preston Infirmary; at Blackpool; and at St Arnaud (Victoria) in aid of the Ladies Benevolent Society. But on all occasions the 'Ladies' were actually young men in female attire, mostly without beards or moustaches. Moreover, the 'extraordinary costumes' worn by the 'Gentlemen' at Fleetwood were reminiscent of the 'Zulu' footballers who, with blackened faces, had played a series of charity matches at Sheffield and elsewhere from November 1879 to raise money for the widows and orphans of British soldiers killed during the Anglo-Zulu War.⁶³

Madam Kenney's Edinburgh team v Madam Wills' Grimsby Town team

Besides men in drag, there were some well-publicised women's football matches in spring 1887. These were ostensibly between Madam Kenney's 'famous' Edinburgh team and Madam Wills' Grimsby Town team. Their first known fixture was played at an unnamed north-country town (possibly Grimsby) for the prize of a silver cup. What was intended as a humorous account of this event was printed in the *Cardiff Times* on Saturday, 2 April. According to the sketch writer, many of the male spectators went along merely out of curiosity. Prior to kick-off there was also much speculation as to what the ladies would wear. Eventually, after much waiting and joshing, the two teams were escorted onto the pitch flanked by policemen. Upon discarding their outer garments – 'by gum ... like a transformation scene' – the ladies revealed themselves to be attired in the ordinary garments of male footballers, 'nothing more nor less'.

Cruelly, some of the pioneers of this 'new era of female muscularity' were described as fat; their bulk better suited to an agricultural show than a football field. Nor were they 'fair to gaze upon' with their 'snub noses, toothless gums, and frowsy hair'. As for the game, it was 'uncommonly slow', provoking a 'verbal fusillade' of playful humour laced with imprecations from the crowd. Indeed, it became so 'wearisome' that interest was maintained only through 'tooth and nail contests'; i.e. watching opposing players scratch and pull each other's hair. Eventually, having had his fill of this 'unedifying exhibition', the reporter left early as did some of the disillusioned spectators.⁶⁴

Undeterred, large posters were used to advertise a follow-up match for Good Friday, 8 April at East End F.C.'s ground on Holderness Road in Hull. Club officials had agreed beforehand to let their ground for the small advance payment of £1 to a Mr G. Soule, manager of a music-hall called the Alhambra Palace. Soule had led them to believe that the fixture was to be played between two theatrical companies then in Hull. He had omitted to mention, however, that it was to be a ladies' match. On realising that they had been duped, the club officials confronted Soule, but he reacted in a most ungentlemanly manner. Accordingly they took legal advice, only to be told that they could be sued for damages if they prevented the match from going ahead. At the same time Soule claimed that he had also been negotiating with the honorary secretary of Southcoates F.C., who apparently had been prepared to let their ground in return for a third of the gate money.⁶⁵

Meanwhile a rumour spread that the female footballers were actually ballet dancers, prompting a columnist for the local press to express surprise that a 'decent' club like East End could be associated with such a 'low and demoralising' spectacle. He therefore hoped that the 'football-loving' public of Hull

would withhold their support from a match that would doubtless bring the 'noble game' into disrepute. For good measure, at their annual general meeting the Hull and District Rugby Football Union passed a motion proposed by Southcoates F.C.'s secretary condemning the upcoming 'Ladies Football Competition'.⁶⁶ What happened next can be pieced together primarily from correspondence printed in the *Hull Daily Mail*.

Although the match went ahead, it was unceremoniously abandoned after the players were 'mobbed by roughs'. Thousands had turned up, the vast majority out of 'idle curiosity'. But after only two or three minutes a 'physically powerful' section of the crowd broke down the barriers and began encroaching on the pitch. Amidst 'derisive laughter' and with players and spectators compressed into 'one inseparable, screaming mass of excited men and fainting women', play was stopped. As with the 'international' match played at Glasgow on 16 May 1881, so at Hull on 8 April 1887 the teams had to be escorted off the pitch by the police 'in a high state of nervousness and damaged condition'. Indeed, it was subsequently remarked that the match promoters should have thought themselves highly fortunate if the 'contestants' had escaped without serious harm. To add insult to injury, and again evoking the fate of the women footballers of 1881, the 'indignant crowd' reportedly demanded their money back only to discover that the gatekeeper had absconded with the match takings. Remarking upon the incident, one commentator suggested that the ill-starred young ladies were 'mere tools' in the hands of unscrupulous impresarios, who acted only from 'mercenary motives'. Another eye-witness called it a 'distinctly disgraceful scene', but likewise considered the players largely blameless. There was nothing reproachable about their costumes. Rather, the rowdy elements within the crowd were responsible for creating a 'dangerous hullabaloo' that was 'utterly unwarrantable'.⁶⁷

Afterwards both the honorary secretaries of East End and Southcoates distanced their clubs from the match promoter in communications to the *Hull Daily Mail*. Yet relations between the clubs became strained. So much so that a planned fixture was scratched following a 'scandalous statement' made by an East End official at that club's dinner.⁶⁸ Less than a week after the Good Friday debacle, the Grimsby team's agent wrote to the secretary of a club in Batley (Yorkshire) asking if a ground could be procured in the neighbourhood for a women's football match. Thornes F.C. near Wakefield agreed to host the fixture, which was played on Saturday, 16 April. Because of its novelty, a large number of people went along 'out of curiosity'. Yet the few 'respectable' individuals among them were soon shocked by the 'disgusting' and likely lewd remarks directed at the players. Unsurprisingly, this 'pitiable' exhibition prompted disapproval in the press with one commentator bemoaning that it served only to disgust 'right thinking people'. Another strongly condemned the sight of

women publicly 'unsexing themselves' by dressing in male garb. Coupled with the unseemly manner in which the female players had sought to make money from the affair, he opposed anything that had 'a tendency to lessen or destroy the innate delicacy of the female character'. As for the match result, it barely merited a mention: the so-called 'Scotch' team won 1-0.⁶⁹

On the occasion of their next known contest, Grimsby rather than Edinburgh were reportedly the holders of the 'Ladies' Silver Cup'. So it is likely that there had been at least one intervening fixture before what appears to have been their final game. This 'Grand ladies' football match' was played on Saturday, 14 May 1887 at Soothill Wood Gardens near Batley. There are differing accounts, however, of the proceedings. Hence one report indicated that the attendance was much smaller than expected. Alternatively, there was a large body of spectators, come to witness something perhaps unprecedented in their district. Shortly after 3.30 the players began to arrive. Dressed in old skirts, they presented a 'wretched appearance'. When all had assembled they commenced, 'amid great laughter', to remove their outer garments revealing underneath the usual attire worn by footballers generally. The *Densbury Chronicle* derided this exhibition of association football as being of the 'most meagre description', with no rule observed, careless play and aimless kicking. *Batley News*, on the other hand, thought it had gone well; the ladies playing an 'interesting and plucky' game. Indeed, the spectators seemed to thoroughly 'enjoy the fun'. All the same, neither newspaper recorded the result. Nor, at present, can anything more be said about these particular lady footballers.⁷⁰

By the time of the formation of the English Football League in April 1888 two types of women's football had begun to emerge. One was played for money and essentially an offshoot of the music hall. Indeed, newspaper descriptions of well-built young ladies with athletic physiques, several of whom looked like ballet dancers, suggest an overlap between performances on the pitch and stage. Moreover, although tickets to see these advertised shows were relatively expensive, fixtures were generally well-attended – even if a disconcerting number of spectators were considered by many contemporary observers to have been socially undesirable troublemakers. The large crowds are partly explicable because of the novelty. In addition, since matches were played in the warmer spring and early summer months there was less chance of them clashing with the professional men's football season, which extended from September to April. Even so, as we have seen, the standard of play was often criticised.

By contrast, the other type of women's football taking shape was largely played for both enjoyment and exercise. Ranging from participatory spectating at folk football contests and kickabouts on the street to organised games on festive occasions, some of these lady footballers – particularly those who had informally formed female football clubs – were striving to make women's

football more socially acceptable. This goal of placing women's football on a par with women's golf, cricket, tennis and other more established female sporting recreations was a gradual process. Played out against a backdrop of ongoing debate as to the suitability of various forms of female physical activity, not to mention anxiety as to the risks to health and childbearing, sometimes this goal was linked to advocacy for women's rights. A notable example was a proposed tour of Australia in 1891 by two New Zealand women's rugby teams just a couple of years before their government gave women the right to vote.⁷¹ Furthermore, like their financially motivated counterparts, all women footballers had to contend with ridicule and prejudice. Accusations of indecency were also common, depending upon the extent to which players disrobed and whether their kit was tight-fitting. Yet even negative press and crowd taunts served to publicise the phenomenon. As a forthcoming article will show, further publicity for female football was provided by the donning of fancy dress costumes, popular songs, comedic characters, visual depictions, literary representations and growing historical knowledge about the game's origins. All the while, it must not be forgotten, women continued watching football. Indeed, there would soon even be female football reporters, agents and shareholders. In short, there is still more to say about women's football before the establishment of the British Ladies' Football Club in autumn 1894.

Notes

- 1 *The Sketch*, 9 (27 March 1895), pp.444-445.
- 2 Dorothy Middleton, 'Dixie [née Douglas], Lady Florence Caroline (1855–1905)', ODNB; *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 February 1895), p.10.
- 3 James Lee, *The Lady Footballers: Struggling to play in Victorian Britain*, Abingdon 2008; see also Patrick Brennan, 'The British Ladies' Football Club', https://www.donmouth.co.uk/womens_football/blfc.html.
- 4 Robert Lewis, *Female Football Spectators in Britain 1863–1939. A Historical Analysis*, Abingdon, 2023.
- 5 Patrick Brennan, "'England" v "Scotland" – 1881', https://www.donmouth.co.uk/womens_football/1881.html; Tim Tate, *Women's Football. The Secret History*, London, 2016, pp. 6–17; Jean Williams, *The History of Women's Football*, Barnsley, 2021, pp. 5–9; Suzanne Wrack, *A Woman's Game. The Rise, Fall, and Rise Again of Women's Football*, London, 2022, pp.15-21; S. Gibbs, 'The First Tour of Women's Association Football – 1881', in Fiona Skillen, Helena Byrne and Gary James, eds, *Histories of Women's Football in Britain and Ireland*, Oxford, 2025, pp.25-40.
- 6 Stuart Gibbs has argued that the players were 'surplus to requirements' of a theatrical company that performed *Les Cloches de Cornerville* at Glasgow in April 1881. One part of this company was trained by Mr Charles Bernard, the other by Lizzie Gilbert who had previously toured with her 'Juvenile Ballet Troupe', <https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/articles/football/and-i-mean-that-most-sincerely-theatre-and-the-birth-of-womens-football>. But these 'little performers' were children, whereas the majority of newspapers described the footballers as young women in their late teens or early twenties. It should be added that a later report claimed that they were waitresses working at the Grand Café Parisien on Buchanan Street, Glasgow. This, however, was emphatically denied by the manager, resulting in an apology from the newspaper that had printed the story.
- 7 Genealogical research has suggested that at least two of the players were actors.
- 8 It is possible that the drill hall was adjacent to the Tron Church near Glasgow Cross.
- 9 This replay was watched by an estimated crowd of 10,000. Queen's Park defeated the home team Rangers 3-1.
- 10 It is not known how many paid for admission, but ticket prices were likely one shilling.
- 11 It was reported that the English players wore the lion rampant badge. But since the royal banner of Scotland is a red lion rampant, I have assumed this was a mistake.
- 12 Some accounts have 'high-laced boots'. But high-heeled boots are in keeping with contemporary representations.

- 13 **Scotland:** Ethel Hay (goal), Bella Oswald, Georgina Wright (backs), Rose Rayman [Raynham], Isa Stevenson (half-backs), Emma Wright, Louise Cole, Lily St Clair, Maud Riweford [Rimeford / Riverford], Carrie Baliol, Minnie Brymner (forwards); **England:** May Goodwin [Godwin] (goal), Mabel Bradbury, Maud(e) Hopewell (backs), Maud(e) Starling, Ada Everstone (half-backs), Geraldine Vintner [Ventner], Mabel Vance, Eva Davenport, Minnie Hopewell, Kate Mellon [Mellor], Nelly Sherwood (forwards).
- 14 Some newspapers reckoned there were only 400 or 500 paying spectators, while others estimated that more than 5,000 people attended.
- 15 It was said their 'costume was suitable, and at a distance the players could scarcely be distinguished from those in ordinary football matches'.
- 16 The stakes had been used to attach the ropes to the ground.
- 17 Blackburn Olympic were a team with working-class roots that would win the FA Cup in 1883.
- 18 *Aberdeen Evening Express* (29 July 1881); *Cornishman* (11 August 1881).
- 19 Horatio Paterson and Co., 346 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. The photograph may still be extant, although I have been unable to find it.
- 20 *Glasgow Evening Citizen* (30 June 1881).
- 21 J. Hutchinson, 'Some aspects of football crowds before 1914' (1974), quoted in W. Vamplew, 'Sports Crowd Disorder in Britain, 1870–1914: Causes and Controls', *Journal of Sport History*, 7 (1980), p.6.
- 22 S. Gibbs, 'Constance Cole – The Second Scorer', *The Hive Journal*, 2 (2024), pp.1-10.
- 23 *Dundee Courier* (30 May 1882).
- 24 *Aberdeen Weekly News* (2 August 1884); *Bury and Norwich Post* (28 August 1888); *Scottish Referee* (4 August 1890); *Coatbridge Express* (6 August 1890); *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* (24 March 1891).
- 25 *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (7 October 1882).
- 26 *Naracoorte Herald* (12 August 1884).
- 27 *Tarrangower Times* (13 May 1862).
- 28 *Bendigo Advertiser* (2 August 1880); *The Herald* (2 August 1880); *Tarrangower Times* (4 August 1880); *The Mercury* (6 August 1880).
- 29 *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* (4 March 1882).
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Arthur Creech Jones: the quiet revolutionary

and the Labour Party's pre- and post-war policy on African colonial self-government

Duncan Bowie

Introduction

Much of the literature on the international policy of the Attlee government focuses on the record of Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary. Less attention has been given to that government's colonial policy, led by Arthur Creech Jones, Colonial Minister from 1946 to 1950, who is perhaps one of the least known members of Attlee's postwar cabinet.

In his political career, Creech Jones had two main interests – workers' education and colonial self-government, which he saw as inter-related. He served first as Under-Secretary of State and then as Colonial Secretary (Minister) in the post-war Labour government. He should be regarded as one of the founders of the modern Commonwealth as well as the leading advocate of African self-government.¹ Current academic debate on the British Empire tends to overlook the support given by elements of the British socialist movement to African nationalism, or the role of the postwar British government in advancing African self-government. Creech Jones, who had been active on colonial policy since the early 1920s had a central role in both these processes. This article seeks to explain Creech Jones's approach to decolonisation through examining his socialist background and principles and how they impacted on his actions both inside and outside government, and considers the trajectory of the Labour Party's colonial policy over the forty years of his involvement.

Creech Jones's Early Political Career

Creech Jones was born in Bristol in 1891, the son of a lithographic printer. He attended Whitehall boys' school, staying on an extra year on a scholarship to study French, Mathematics and Commerce. On leaving school in 1905, he worked in a solicitor's office. Having studied at evening classes and passed the civil service junior clerks' examination, he moved to London in January 1907 to

work as a clerk in the War Office, later joining the Crown Agents. He became active in socialist politics in South London and served as secretary of the Dulwich Independent Labour Party from 1912 to 1916 and of the Camberwell Trades Council from 1913 to 1922.² During the war, he organised anti-conscription meetings for the ILP. He was an absolute pacifist, and was a member of the No Conscription Fellowship and the South London Federal Council against Conscription.³ He applied to serve in the Society of Friends' (Quakers) ambulance unit but in September 1916 he was court-martialled and sentenced to six months hard labour, which he served in Wormwood Scrubs. He was not released until April 1919. Forty years later, he drew on this experience to publish a pamphlet for the Fabian Society on prison reform.⁴

After the war Creech Jones was appointed organising secretary of the Docks, Wharfs and Shipping Staffs Union, which was in 1922 incorporated into the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). Ernest Bevin, the TGWU general secretary, became his political mentor. Creech Jones became national secretary for the union's administrative, clerical and supervisory group. In 1923, the TGWU sent him to the Ruhr with Ben Tillett, the veteran trade unionist who was TGWU international and political secretary, and Samuel Warren, a member of the union executive, to report on the effect of the French occupation of the Ruhr on the workers. Their co-authored 68-page report set out in some detail the negative impact of the French occupation on the Ruhr economy and workforce and called for the withdrawal of the French occupiers.⁵

Creech Jones and Africa in the 1920s

Creech Jones's interest in Africa was first sparked by the campaigns of Edmund Morel and Roger Casement against colonial atrocities in the Congo. In 1925, he was asked to help Clements Kadalie, who had established a union for black workers in South Africa, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). As Kadalie remarked later, 'I felt that the struggle of the African workers in South Africa could be helped by a type of organisation which had contributed so much to the making of British democracy...'⁶ He had made contact with the author Winifred Holtby, an active feminist and member of the ILP, who had visited South Africa and who had contacts with liberals there. She had already been seeking to obtain funds and books for ICU libraries through the ILP's paper, *New Leader*.⁷ Kadalie had also written directly to Creech Jones, who drafted a constitution for the ICU.

Kadalie travelled to Europe to seek support. In Britain, Holtby acted as his host and the ILP's Imperialism Committee, which included Creech Jones and the ILP secretary Fenner Brockway (who also had a lifelong interest in Africa) organised a promotional tour of England. In 1927, Kadalie had attended the

International Trade Union conference in Paris and then the International Labour Organisation conference in Geneva, as well as meeting trade union leaders in Berlin and Prague. He also attended the British TUC conference as a visitor, though his request for delegate status was turned down on the grounds that the ICU was not affiliated to the (white) South African Trade Union Congress.

Holtby and Creech Jones set up a fund to send a British trade unionist to South Africa to help Kadalie. Holtby supported the fund from the sales of her African novel *Mandoa Mandoa!*. William Ballinger, a trade unionist from Motherwell was selected for the task, and reached South Africa in July 1928. Although Ballinger soon fell out with Kadalie, he remained in South Africa, setting up agricultural co-operatives and working with the African National Congress. He was financially supported by a Friends of Africa Committee, established in 1934 by Creech Jones and Holtby, with Julius Lewin, a South African living in London as secretary.⁸ This was a significant example of international trade union solidarity.

Labour and the Empire

Creech Jones was of course not the first Labour politician to be critical of the British governance of its empire. The Labour Party's founder and first parliamentary leader, Keir Hardie, had supported Indian nationalists, and both Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald had opposed the British role in the South African or Boer war, 1899-1901. But figures like Sidney Webb and other early Fabians such as Sidney Olivier, who later became governor of Jamaica, had seen a reformed empire as performing a civilising role, as set out in Webb's classic text of 1900, *Fabianism and the Empire*. As the early historian of Labour and imperialism, Tingfu Tsiang, concluded in 1923, 'the predominant characteristic of the reaction of British labour to British imperialism in Africa from 1880 to 1920 is acquiescence'.⁹

In the years after the First World War, the Labour Party began to issue policy statements on the empire.¹⁰ Official Labour policy was to reform rather than to abolish the empire, although many leading members of the party and the ILP such as Noel Brailsford, Edmund Morel, Leonard Barnes, Norman Leys, Fenner Brockway, Charles Roden Buxton, Leonard Woolf and Philip Noel Baker published books and pamphlets critical of British colonial practice.

In 1920, the Labour Party had published *The Empire in Africa: Labour's Policy*, which set out two key principles: '1) No economic exploitation of one class (native) by another class (white man); 2) The government must secure for the native the opportunity of developing, as a free man, the economic resources of the land for the benefit of the native communities.'¹¹ A revised edition was published as *Labour and the Empire: Africa* in 1926, with an introduction by J. H.

(Jimmy) Thomas, who set out three key policy positions: '1) The natives must be assured sufficient land for their support and therefore the land must be treated as the property of the native communities; 2) The native must, as a worker, be a free man, and hence there should be no slavery, no forced labour and no pressure upon him to work for settlers; and 3) the administration must make itself responsible for educating the native to take his place, both economically and politically, as a free man in conditions which Western civilization has imposed on Africa.'¹² In 1928, the Labour Party presented a detailed report on its colonial policy and the conditions in each colony, to the 1928 Brussels congress of the Labour and Socialist International.¹³

However neither the 1924 nor the 1929-31 Labour governments had a significant impact on the practice of British colonial administrators, other than some movement towards increase native participation in the government of India. Moreover, Jimmy Thomas, who served as Colonial Secretary in Macdonald's first 1924 government, and as Dominions Secretary in the 1929-1931 and 1931-1935 governments, had declared at the outset that there would be 'no mucking about with the Empire' while he was in charge. Sidney Webb (now ennobled as Lord Passfield) who served as Colonial Secretary in the 1929-1931 government, adopted a more progressive approach than that of Thomas, and promoted 'native paramountcy'.¹⁴

In 1933, the Labour Party published a new policy statement on *The Colonies*. However, there was little discussion within the Labour Party on colonial policy in Africa (as opposed to India) until the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. In response, the party published *The Demand for Colonial Territories and Equality of Economic Opportunity* (1936).¹⁵ This pamphlet, prepared by a committee (which did not include Creech Jones), called for an international conference to consider access by the competing colonising powers to raw materials, access to trade markets and migration – i.e., colonial settlement. In December 1938, the Labour Party published a speech given by Philip Noel Baker in the House of Commons under the title *Common Sense About Colonies*.¹⁶ It argued that all colonies should be subject to the League of Nations mandate system and that the primary purpose of colonial policy should be the welfare and progress of the native inhabitants. While the mandate system recognised the case for increased native participation in administration, it did not require the mandatory powers to promote self-government or independence in the colonies for which they held responsibility.

Creech Jones and Labour Policy

Creech Jones's interests in the 1920s and 1930s were not limited to colonial affairs. He had a deep commitment to workers' education, becoming a governor

of Ruskin College, the trade union college in Oxford, in 1923. He was also an active member of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), for which he wrote a handbook, *Trade Unionism Today* (1928), which was widely used in the colonies.¹⁷ This commitment was later to have a central role in his attitude to preparing colonies in Africa and beyond for self-government.

Creech Jones, a member of the Fabian Society executive committee since 1925, became involved in the New Fabian Research Bureau, established by G. D. H. Cole in 1931. He also joined the Socialist League (SL), the Labour left group created after the fall of the Labour government in 1931 and the disaffiliation of the ILP from Labour in 1932. His association with the SL was brief. He did not agree with its position on the British Empire as set out in J. F. Horrabin's 1933 essay 'The Break with Imperialism'. Horrabin argued that 'the British Empire offers us no practical foundation for the building of a Socialist Commonwealth'.¹⁸ Apparently, Creech Jones had earlier offered to write a pamphlet for the League, an offer which had not been taken up.¹⁹ He also kept his distance from the Communist Party-sponsored League Against Imperialism, which adopted a Leninist critique of imperialism and colonialism and which drew in some of his former ILP colleagues, including James Maxton and the Vicar of Thaxted Conrad Noel.²⁰

Creech Jones was keen, with support of his union, to get into Parliament. He failed to get elected in Heywood and Radcliffe in 1929, but was returned for Shipley in Yorkshire in 1935. He joined the Labour Party's advisory committee on imperial questions – a separate body from its advisory committee on international relations, though there was some common membership. He was one of its most regular participants, attending 37 of the 61 meetings between December 1935 and September 1939, becoming chairman in December 1943. He was very prominent in asking parliamentary questions on colonial issues – 46 in the 1935-6 parliamentary session; 55 in 1936-7; 153 in 1937-8 and 123 in 1938-9.²¹ In 1936, he was appointed to the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, and served on the committee until the 1945 election.

He used his position as an MP to raise a range of colonial questions. He was especially concerned about labour conditions in the West Indies. In July 1937, together with his colleague, Susan Lawrence, who had visited the West Indies, he called for the repeal of the Masters and Servants ordinances which applied there and called for the establishment of a standing advisory committee on labour questions with non-official representation, a proposal that was rejected by Ministers, with the Treasury refusing to fund the appointment of a full-time labour adviser.

The same year, oil workers went on strike in Trinidad, leading to unrest and riots. Creech Jones called for the nationalisation of the oil companies.²² He campaigned successfully with Leonard Woolf and the West Indian economist,

Arthur Lewis, to secure for local trade unions the same legal protections as British trade unions.²³

Creech Jones was linked to a number of networks. He joined the executive committee of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1938, a role he continued until 1954. He also helped to set up a Trades Union Congress colonial affairs committee in 1937. Following the Jamaica revolt of 1938, he joined the Committee on West Indian Affairs, which included Harold Moody of the League of Coloured Peoples, Reginald Bridgman of the League against Imperialism, Norman Manley of the Jamaican Peoples' National Party, with Paul Robeson as fundraiser. He participated in the Union for Democratic Control and spoke at its conference in July 1939, called to resist proposals from appeasers both within and outside the national Government to transfer British colonies to Germany. He was also a visitor to the West African Students Union (WASU), which included future African nationalist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Joe Appiah and J. B. Danquah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria and Milton Margai of Sierra Leone, and called for universal suffrage and dominion status for the West African colonies.²⁴

At the Labour Party 1939 conference, Creech Jones argued that western democratic institutions such as local government and trade unions should be introduced in Africa – 'do not let us be hoodwinked by anthropologists and those who believe in indirect rule and would ask us to work through the Chiefs'.²⁵ He lobbied against the introduction of sedition ordinances in Sierra Leone and opposed the reservation of land to white settlers in the Kenyan highlands. He was also central to committing the Labour Party, through its advisory committee on imperial questions to extend the colonial franchise 'without restrictions on the grounds of race, colour, religion, property or sex'.²⁶ His overall position was to advocate self-government within the framework of the Empire.

Establishing the Fabian Colonial Bureau

In 1940, together with Rita Hinden, a South African economist who had just returned to London from Palestine, and with the support of the Fabian Society's Margaret Cole and John Parker, Creech Jones founded the Fabian Colonial Bureau (FCB). This body, which he chaired, was to be the main focus of his political activity until 1945, when he became a Minister. The only two other people who attended the founding meeting were Professor William McMillan, who had published books on Africa and the West Indies and Wilfred Benson of the International Labour Organisation. The purpose of the organisation was to be 'a clearing house for colonial information and research'. The bureau was to inspire appropriate informed parliamentary questions and Creech Jones organised a panel of interested MPs to do this, which had grown to twenty members by

1945.²⁷ Funds were obtained from Lord Faringdon. He used his networks to involve a wide range of individuals in the bureau's executive and advisory committees including Leonard Woolf who chaired the Labour Party's advisory committee, J. F. Horrabin, Arthur Lewis, the biologist Julian Huxley, the Africanist Margery Perham, the Scottish Labour MP Sir Drummond Shields, H. N. Brailsford, Reginald Sorensen MP, Lord Listowel, and C. Greenidge of the Anti-Slavery Society.²⁸

Together with Rita Hinden, the FCB secretary, Creech Jones became the leading supporter of African nationalists, an advocate of both colonial self-government and native education in the colonies as well as a constructive critic of British colonial policy under the succession of wartime coalition government colonial ministers, Malcolm Macdonald, Lord Lloyd, Lord Moyne, Viscount Cranborne and Oliver Stanley. He campaigned against the suppression of African associations in Kenya. He was also a member of a 'commonwealth group' of Labour MPs, led by Dr Haden Guest, which at the 1942 Labour Party conference, pushed through a policy against Attlee and the party leadership calling for a Charter of Freedom for Colonial Peoples. This was based on five key principles: full equality in political, economic and social rights of colonial peoples with British; the abolition of colonial status and the elevation of former colonies to equal status with the self-governing dominions; the organisation of democratic systems of government based upon indigenous institutions; communal native ownership of land and the nationalisation of all natural resources; and the establishment of a Commonwealth council.²⁹ In his contribution to the 1942 National Peace Council pamphlet, Creech Jones concluded that

We have passed through the days of aggressive imperialism in our own empire; liberal imperialism has also proved inadequate and negative, though important and valuable in establishing order and justice and shaping political advances. We are now entering on another phase, the beginnings of which are already marked by constructive achievements in a number of the colonies. This phase is the period of constructive work in health, education, economic advance and improved standards of living. Coincident with it must be political development and world order, international accountability and organisation. It is our duty to make our sacred trust vital and dynamic, so that the colonial peoples may, as early as possible, take their place as free peoples in the commonwealth of free nations.³⁰

Creech Jones and Labour Colonial Policy during World War II

During the war, Creech Jones acted as the Labour Party's spokesman on colonial affairs in Parliament. He welcomed the proposal by the Colonial Office's Lord Hailey to use the term 'partnership' rather than 'trusteeship' for Britain's relationship with the colonies as it better expressed 'equality and friendship, the idea of service and practical assistance and which expresses it in dynamic and constructive terms'.³¹ He also accompanied Hailey and Attlee to the Institute of Pacific Relations conference at Mount Tremblant in Canada in December 1942, which discussed postwar policy on the colonies with the Americans, who were critical of the previous British record. Creech Jones reported to Harold Macmillan that

The temperature about Britain is pretty low... the ignorance about colonial policy is the past four or five years is profound... It is difficult to discuss the subject with Americans because they are not only uninformed about it but they picture an almost semi-feudal Britain and society nearly 100 years out-of-date. They love idealistic generalisations, glowing phrases, which ignore the actualities of the colonial situation, and seem impatient of the practical approaches to policy-making so common with Englishmen.³²

Creech Jones contributed to the 1943 Labour Party statement *The Colonies. The Labour Party's Post-War Policy for African and Pacific Colonies*,³³ which was apparently based on a draft Leonard Woolf had written two years earlier.³⁴ The general principles of Labour's policy were stated as:

- 1) The territories should be administered by colonial powers as a trust for the native inhabitants, the principal object of the administration being the well-being, education and development of those inhabitants; and
- 2) A primary object of the administration should always be to train the native inhabitants in every possible way so that they may be able in the shortest possible time to govern themselves.

The statement included detailed policies on abolition of all racial discrimination in political representation, land ownership, trade unions, taxation and colonial administration, on labour protection and wages, on primary, secondary, technical and higher education and on public health.

The Fabian Colonial Bureau during the war

The FCB was to publish a wide range of books and pamphlets on Africa and colonial policy during the war. Rita Hinden published her *Plan for Africa* in 1941, for which Creech Jones wrote the foreword, arguing

I believe the British people are liberally and humanistically inclined... By the passing of the Colonial Welfare and Development Act, Parliament has already declared the bankruptcy of the old *laissez-faire* policy.... This book will help to eradicate the romanticism of false doctrines of empire, and show us, in the light of our past and present policies, how to reshape our work in bringing nearer the day when the African can stand erect, healthy, prosperous, independent, and free in a world that has learned to replace imperial rivalries by a rational commonwealth of free peoples.³⁵

Other publications by the FCB during the war included a 1941 report on labour in the colonies, and a short book *Downing Street and the Colonies* edited by Hinden in 1942, with contributions from Creech Jones, Sir Drummond Shields, Arthur Lewis and C. Greenidge.³⁶ There was a pamphlet on *International action and the colonies* published in 1943, and a report on co-operation in the colonies in 1945. Creech Jones, Hinden, Lewis and Professor Norman Bentwich also contributed to a National Peace Council pamphlet *Freedom for Colonial Peoples* (1943).³⁷

Creech Jones also actively pursued the issue of international trusteeship for colonies. There was a debate at this time about what should be done with the Italian and Japanese colonies captured during the war, and a proposal that the United Nations take over the mandated League of Nations territories such as Tanganyika. He wrote a pamphlet on the *International Trusteeship of Colonies* for the Anti-Slavery Society in 1945, and co-authored with Rita Hinden a pamphlet on *The Colonies and International Conscience* for the Fabian Society in the same year.³⁸ This latter pamphlet responded to the adoption of the United Nations Charter, with its provisions that all colonies, not just the former League of Nations mandates, should be monitored by the United Nations. This met with some resistance from the British government and Colonial Office. Unlike George Bernard Shaw and Leonard Woolf, however, Creech Jones thought that Britain had a continuing responsibility for its colonies and was not in favour of handing them over to an international body.³⁹

In 1945 Creech Jones contributed the introduction to *Fabian Colonial Essays*, edited by Rita Hinden, as well as writing an essay on the need for an accelerated policy of social reconstruction in the colonial empire. His introduction made the case for socialists to be interested in colonial matters. In true Fabian tradition, it raised a number of questions without setting out an overall policy

position. His essay was more substantive, setting out the position of development funding in specific colonies before stating that

social and economic development is the necessary condition of freedom and independence. The mere declaration of freedom is of no avail if the people of a territory are too weak, too poor and too inexperienced to stand on their own feet. In this insecure world of power politics, small peoples, are of themselves, likely to be unable to maintain independence and meet the needs of defence and economic stability. Yet, they must be helped to pay their way and sustain the fabric of civilized life. They must know how to work political institutions and engage in administration. But these things depend on the development of resources of a territory and the growth of economic organization and sound social conditions. It means that there must be achieved a wide advance in education and the conditions for preserving important social services and standards of living.⁴⁰

Creech Jones joins the Government

Between 1940 and 1944, Creech Jones was PPS to Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour in the wartime coalition. With the election of a Labour government in August 1945, Creech Jones was appointed Under-Secretary of State in the Colonial Office. The Secretary of State (Minister) was George Hall, a former miner and MP for Aberdare. Hall was the leader of the Welsh Labour Party, a friend of Attlee who had served as a junior Colonial Minister, and then as a junior Foreign Minister in the wartime coalition government. His main interests were trade unionism and cooperatives. Creech Jones, as Hall's junior Minister, with more extensive expertise in and interest in colonial matters, was given significant responsibilities.

While Hall focused on the Palestine mandate, a policy led by Bevin as foreign secretary, Creech Jones focused on colonial policy. In promoting the 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare Bill, which increased colonial development and research funding to £120 million for the following decade in parliament, Creech Jones openly declared that the Labour government was ultimately aiming at 'the liquidation of colonial status'.

Creech Jones as Colonial Minister

In August 1946, Hall was given a peerage, becoming deputy Labour leader in the House of Lords, and Creech Jones was promoted to the Cabinet position, which he held until his defeat in the 1950 general election. As Secretary of State for the Colonies, Creech Jones sought to prepare them for self-government,

with a focus on their social and economic development, and in particular on education.

It is perhaps surprising that Creech Jones had not been given that post already in 1945. He had after all been the most prominent speaker in Parliament on colonial questions since his election in 1935, being known as the 'MP for the Kikuyu' or even the 'MP for Empire'. He was Labour Party spokesman during the war years. However, he was apparently not a friend of Attlee. Their backgrounds were very different. Creech Jones had been educated in a state school, had not gone to university, and had been a conscientious objector, trade unionist, and critic of British colonial practice. Attlee had been educated at Haileybury School and Oxford University, had served in the army during the war, and was a fairly uncritical defender of Britain's imperial record.

Moreover, Creech Jones was an associate of Ernest Bevin, Attlee's foreign secretary and greatest rival within the administration. Attlee was apparently reluctant to promote Creech Jones, commenting that he was 'perhaps hardly strong enough for the position'. Attlee was later to comment that 'Creech Jones despite much hard work and devotion had not appeared to have a real grip of administration in the colonial office. He was bad in the house and contributed nothing to Cabinet'.⁴¹

In view of this lack of support from Attlee or the Chancellor Hugh Dalton, it was remarkable how much Creech Jones achieved during his tenure. This was partly because Bevin, although much more of a supporter of the Empire than Creech Jones, left colonial matters to his protégé, while he focused on Atlantic and European politics, NATO, and the cold war with the Soviet Union. As long as Creech Jones kept communist influence out of the African colonies, Bevin was prepared to tolerate reforms in colonial practice, even those involving collaboration with African nationalists.

It is interesting to note Rita Hinden's view of the position of the Labour government after its first year, that is just before Creech Jones took over from Hall. Writing in *Socialists and the Empire*, her review of the first five years' work of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, she commented:

As the disappointments of ambitious colonial peoples become more articulate, and as what appears to be a close continuity of policy with the Conservatives stirs increasing uneasiness among the Party's own supporters, a new phase of heart-searching begins... under the pressure of political reality, Labour has shed its early attachment to the idea of a simple and immediate liquidation of the Empire. Instead, it has evolved a reformist policy, bringing it perilously close to the policies which history and the force of public opinion have already impelled other parties to adopt. Now the power is its hands, it finds this line cannot satisfy. A policy of reforms, however worthy, does not begin to answer the strident cries of colonial nationalists, and carries no

conviction that the British Empire, even when run by socialists, is anything but the same old wolf flaunting a new lambskin.⁴²

Creech Jones was perhaps the first Colonial Secretary to sympathise more with the indigenous population than with the colonising settlers. On occasions, he referred to African nationalist leaders as 'his friends'. He was certainly a contrast to his Labour predecessors, Jimmy Thomas and Sidney Webb, although some of his measures followed through on reforms initiated by previous colonial secretaries such as Malcolm MacDonald or the relatively progressive Conservative, Oliver Stanley.⁴³ Creech Jones later remarked 'I suppose I brought to the Colonial Office a fresh comprehension of the new African and other colonial aspirations.'⁴⁴

He nevertheless inherited an official team that was only gradually recognising how Britain's colonial position was changing. It now faced pressure from the United States government and later from the United Nations to surrender its colonies to some form of international control if not to full independent status. In the colonies themselves a small but active educated urban class of natives was becoming involved in politics. Creech Jones also inherited a cohort of colonial governors, mostly educated in the pre-war imperialist tradition, who saw themselves as the experienced 'men on the spot'. They felt entitled to ignore the views of Whitehall-based Colonial Office bureaucrats with no experience of service in the actual colonies. In practice, the Colonial Office, and Creech Jones as the Minister, could only advise and encourage, and not direct. He made strenuous efforts, certainly more than any of his predecessors, to work with the colonial governors, but in doing so met with considerable resistance. Several governors would claim that the new policy of promoting self-government was not appropriate in their colony. Creech Jones did, however, find some younger, more progressive officials with whom he could work, among whom the most influential was Andrew Cohen, head of the Colonial Office's Africa section from April 1947.⁴⁵

Creech Jones was not a Marxist. He could perhaps be seen as a radical Fabian social democrat. While not explicitly anti-Communist like Bevin, he nevertheless kept his distance from Communist and Communist-leaning organisations. In his early dealings with Kadalie and black trade unionists in South Africa, he had clearly resisted the interventions by Communist organisers and agitators. During the 1930s and 1940s the British Communist Party had been most active on India. It had paid less attention to the British colonies in Africa, and had been criticised by the Comintern for this neglect. Many African nationalists in London in the 1930s and in the post war years had found more support from ILP figures such as Fenner Brockway, and from Creech Jones and his Fabian Colonial Bureau colleagues. These links continued once Creech Jones had moved into the Colonial Office. Some African nationalists would criticise him for not

moving fast enough, but leaders such as Danqua, Azikwe, Kenyatta and Nyerere were not going to alienate their most important British political contact.

Creech Jones was an open and tolerant empathiser with the nationalist cause. He was always prepared to talk and negotiate if there was a shared objective, even if there were disagreements over the means and the timescales. He was clear that days of the British Empire were numbered. During the war, in an unpublished note on 'Colonies in the Modern World', he wrote that 'Colonial territories need to be liquidated as soon as circumstances permit', and in 1945, promoting the Colonial and Development Bill in Parliament, he went so far as to comment:

It is a commonplace of American criticism in respect of British Imperialism... to demand the liquidation of Colonial status. It is significant that the very purpose of this Bill is to achieve these purposes. I doubt if any Imperial Power has ever before embarked upon a policy of deliberately disintegrating its Empire. That is the effect of the Bill in the long run.⁴⁶

It is hard to imagine Attlee, Bevin, or for that matter George Hall, who was still Colonial Secretary, using the same language.

Creech Jones viewed economic and social development as a precondition for self-government, a view he maintained as Minister. However, he recognised that neither social nor economic development could be imposed on Africans. He was also well aware that development was at very different stages in different colonies. But unlike his predecessors, and most colonial officials, he regarded the Africans themselves as partners in this process. In a speech in Parliament in 1942, he had argued:

There must be a recognition of Africans' rights and status. There must be a big drive in social services, in education and development. We must associate the Africans in the administration of local government. We should nationalise the mineral resources of these areas. We should redistribute the land and there should be planned development of smaller industries.⁴⁷

These remained his key objectives as Minister, though he was in practice able to make much more progress on social services, education, development and local government, than on nationalisation of mineral resources and land redistribution.

Resistance to Creech Jones's Colonial Policy

The centrepiece of Colonial Office policy under Creech Jones's direction was the promotion of 'efficient and democratic' local government. He wanted to

replace the chiefs who dominated the native authorities by urban professionals. The approach was set out in a circular dispatch, drafted by Andrew Cohen, from the Minister to colonial governors on 25 February 1947.⁴⁸ The new policy was to be

local because the system of government must be close to the common people and their problems; efficient because it must be capable of managing the local services in a way which will help to raise the standard of living, and democratic because it must not only find a place for the growing class of educated men, but at the same time command the respect and support of the mass of the people.

The dispatch set out a wide definition of local government:

It covers political questions such as the functions of native authorities, the composition and method of appointment of councils and the constitutional position of chiefs; financial questions such as the workings of national treasuries and the relationship between central and local taxation; judicial questions such as the operation of native courts and the development of African law, both traditional and statutory; and economic questions such as the control of land usage and the evolution of systems of land tenure.

Creech Jones explicitly recognised the potential role of local government in the political development of Africans. He argued that councils at all levels should be directly or indirectly elected to ensure they were representative: 'Local government must at once provide the people with their political education and the channel for the expression of their opinions', and insisted that 'An efficient and democratic system of local government is in fact essential to the healthy political development of the African territories; it is the foundation on which their political progress must be built.' He requested that governors circulate the dispatch to all their administrative officers, so that the new policy was widely understood.

The approach presented several challenges for governors, especially those in colonies where the African population was considered by the colonial authorities to be less advanced. The most vigorous response came from Sir Philip Mitchell, the governor of Kenya, where the administration was in practice in the hands of the white settlers. He responded

Whatever may be the case elsewhere, the only way in which the multitude of East African tribes can enjoy the benefit of civilised government, both central and local, now and for generations to come, before they have become themselves civilised, is under the forms of Colonial Government administered by a strong and enlightened Colonial power and directed, as British

Colonial policy has been for centuries, to the achievement of not any particular system but of a state of society in which the men and women of which it is composed – or at least a large part of them - have reached a state of spiritual, moral, cultural and economic development capable of supporting and operating such democratic forms of government as may then appear desirable to them.

Mitchell was not convinced that 'Western' systems of government were necessary applicable in Africa, claiming that 'Africans are by nature easy going people, unpunctual and inexact and zeal for efficiency on the part of supervising British authorities has to be tempered with tolerance and human understanding if there is not to be disillusion and frustration on the one hand and irritation and fractiousness on the other.'⁴⁹ He went on to comment on the difficulty of obtaining honest African cashiers, arguing that 'this relatively simple moral question is today perhaps the greatest practical obstacle to the progress we all want to see'. He also pointed out that African local authorities could not be seen as sovereign bodies as they derived their powers solely from the colonial government. A chief, traditional or hereditary, only had authority on being officially appointed as a Government servant. Mitchell argued that it was the colonial government that had created the system of chiefs, and that in 'pre-British days, civil administration as we know it, did not exist beyond the village circle'. Mitchell expressed concern lest Creech Jones's reference to an 'educated minority' in practice included 'the large number of Africans who have barely achieved the education of an English boy of fourteen and suppose themselves to be educated'.⁵⁰

Mitchell copied his response to his fellow colonial governors in Africa. The acting governor of Nyasaland said he agreed with Mitchell. Mitchell was not impressed when Creech Jones presented his proposals at the conference of African governors held in Cambridge in November 1947. He was the leading critic of the approach and later commented that 'Creech Jones's speech had 'little relation to realities' and that 'he blathered a good deal'. Mitchell was highly critical of senior officials in the Colonial Office, whom he accused of being 'ignorant schoolboys' taking 'childish nonsense' with 'incredible naivete'.⁵¹ He was disappointed that the West African governors were 'a silent lot, with the exception of Lord Milverton, formerly Sir Arthur Richards, the Governor of Nigeria, who wanted assurances to protect the status of the chiefs. Fortunately for Creech Jones and Cohen, the three main West African governors and the governors of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were due for retirement. In practice each colonial governor was allowed to proceed with constitutional reforms at his own pace.

In late September and early October 1948, Creech Jones held a first conference at Lancaster House in London of African representatives on the legislative councils, though for most of the conference delegates from West Africa and

East Africa met separately.⁵² In closing the conference, Creech Jones sought to reassure the representatives that 'There is a plan... We know what we are doing. We are not fumbling. We are organising things at this end to help.'⁵³ Creech Jones seemed to have more support for his plans from the African representatives than he had from the colonial governors.

In reality, the pace of constitutional reform tended to follow events on the ground. For example, the speedy move towards representative government in the Gold Coast was due more to the impact of major riots in Accra in February and March 1948, than any plan by Creech Jones, with the reforms creating a precedent not just for Nigeria but for the East African colonies as well.⁵⁴

Colonial Education and Economic Development

Creech Jones and Cohen were however more successful in obtaining support for their plans for colonial education and economic development. In 1948, Creech Jones published the report of a commission on *Education for Citizenship in Africa*. The focus of the report was training the colonies for self-government and educating the colonial peoples for democracy. It set out what it called the spiritual and economic pre-requisites of democracy, but recognised what it referred to as 'the disintegrating impact of Western civilisation' on traditional African society. (The anthropologist Margaret Read, who was an education advisor to the colonial office and later wrote a book on *Africans and their Schools*, was a commission member). The report's recommendations stressed the principle of linking the education of Africans to practice in managing their own affairs. Local self-government was presented as education for national self-government, and character-training as the foundation for citizenship. The report discussed different classroom methods in some detail, together with an extended section on education for citizenship amongst adults, drawing on the experience of adult education in England, with which Creech Jones was intimately connected through the WEA. An appendix to the report set out a curriculum for primary and secondary education, and its bibliography included a separate list of reading material for 'African readers' including books on 'character aims' and 'character training'.⁵⁵

Creech Jones also established the Colonial Development Corporation (later renamed the Commonwealth Development Corporation) to support agricultural development in the colonies. An Overseas Resources Development Bill, enacted in 1948, provided £100 million for the corporation. An Overseas Food Corporation provided a further £50 million, though the project to grow groundnuts in West Africa as well as East Africa was to prove a dismal failure, which led to much political controversy which extended beyond Creech Jones's tenure

of office. The government's hope that African resources could help feed Britain in its period of post-war rationing was never realised.⁵⁶

In March 1947, the FCB published a pamphlet containing a speech by Creech Jones outlining Labour's colonial policy, along with a summary of reports, white papers and 'important pronouncements' on colonial affairs by the Labour government that ran to eleven pages, which was quite impressive as it covered a mere eighteen months. The speech restated the party's policy objectives from its 1943 report. However, it was the headings of the speech which gave a sense of Creech Jones's personal approach: Labour's declaration and purpose; Patient work in nation building; From domination to the cooperative approach; Colonial peoples as willing partners; Two-way traffic in understanding; Steps towards political democracy; Bold planning in the colonies; The immensity of the task; Building up social institutions; Private and public enterprise; Economic planning in practice.' No doubt had the speech been given a year later, it would have included a section on 'Education for citizenship'. His opening paragraph stated: 'The Labour government was elected to put through a socialist policy and to apply enlightened principles to the tasks of reconstruction both at home and abroad. I come to my task as a socialist, and I am not content to leave my ideas and political convictions on the threshold of the Colonial Office'.⁵⁷

Out of Office

In November 1950, after he had lost his parliamentary seat, Creech Jones reflected on the Labour government's colonial achievements in an FCB pamphlet entitled *The Way Forward*. He clearly felt undervalued, commenting that 'The remarkable progress in colonial development under the Labour Government in recent years has hardly received from the Party – or the public – the recognition it merits.' Its record was 'unsurpassed by any previous government of this country'.⁵⁸ After a discussion of the constraints on and achievements of his department, he concluded:

The Colonial people are set on the road; we have helped to build for them the machines for their progress; we have given them the technical and financial aid necessary and brought more of their resources into their control and possession; the beginnings in education, better social living, improved economic standards are being made, and the old ideas are passing, as the peoples advance in responsibility. It is a good beginning – but it is only a beginning and we shall press on with the work with pride in our hearts that we are extending the boundaries of freedom and enlightenment and in so doing are winning goodwill and friendship.⁵⁹

Nine years later, when he was back in parliament, and eight years into a Conservative administration with Ghana independent and the independence of most of the other African colonies on the horizon, Creech Jones edited a volume of *New Fabian Colonial Essays*. In this further reflection on his years as Colonial Secretary, he returned to the comments in his 1950 speech and pamphlet quoted above, before concluding:

the conceptions of the Labour government of 1945-51 were clear. Labour was ready with a policy. Its colonial work (inadequate as some of it may have been in the few years available, and mistaken as a few of its actions may have been) was one of the most constructive and satisfying chapters in its whole record, indeed in British colonial history ... Its main decisions affecting nations and peoples stand out as historically momentous ... The socialist Ministers transformed promise into achievement and assisted the dependent countries in their advance to nationhood, independence and better living ... Labour showed great vision and practical confidence ... its remarkable record of liberation and nation building was not only in tune with its own ideas and purposes but with the world which the war of 1939-1945 had ushered in.⁶⁰

It is interesting that in both these reflections, Creech Jones demonstrates a fairly paternalistic, even patronising approach to decolonisation, which does rather overlook the struggle of the African nationalist leaders themselves.

After losing his parliamentary seat, Creech Jones returned to his work in the FCB, although he held off until June 1951 in the hope of a swift return to Parliament, as he believed he had been promised the opportunity to stand in the first by-election. He had maintained close contact with Hinden and his former colleagues during his years in government. Hinden had been replaced as secretary by her assistant, Marjorie Nicholson, while Lord Faringdon had taken over the chair from Horrabin, with Sorensen as vice-chairman. In 1951 Creech Jones published a pamphlet on the *Future of the African Colonies*. He worked with Rev. Michael Scott, who had been jailed for opposing race laws in South Africa and had established an Africa Bureau to provide support for opponents of apartheid and other oppressive regimes in Africa. Creech Jones wrote the Africa Bureau's first pamphlet: *African Challenge: The Fallacy of Federation* (1952) opposing the proposal by the Conservative government for a Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland under settler control. This proposal was being supported by Jim Griffiths, who had succeeded Creech Jones at the Colonial Office 1950-51, and the Labour shadow Commonwealth Secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker.⁶¹

The position of Creech Jones within Labour politics is well illustrated by the case of Seretse Khama. In 1950, after Creech Jones had left office, Gordon

Walker as Commonwealth Secretary prevented Khama, then resident in Britain, from returning to the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland to stake his claim to the chieftdom. This was because Khama had married a white woman, Ruth Williams, and the second Attlee government was afraid of offending the South African government, which had just banned interracial marriage.⁶² Creech Jones supported figures like Michael Scott and the new Labour MP Anthony Wedgwood Benn who protested against what amounted to the exile of Khama from his homeland. But he did not go along with the critique of empire and colonialism adopted by Wedgwood Benn, Fenner Brockway and the 72 Labour MPs who founded and sponsored the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF), which was altogether more radical than the Fabians. The MCF favoured setting target dates for independence of specific colonies, an approach rejected by the Labour Party in its official statement, apparently on the advice of Creech Jones.⁶³

Creech Jones and Hinden were nevertheless happy to collaborate with the radical African nationalists – Julius Nyerere, Hastings Banda, Jomo Kenyatta, J. B. Danquah, Nnamdi Azikwe, Kenneth Kaunda and Tom Mboya were all members of the Fabian Colonial Bureau in the 1950s. Mboya contributed to a pamphlet by Margery Perham on *East African Future* and later wrote his own pamphlet *The Kenya Question: An African Answer*.⁶⁴ It has been argued that the FCB was especially influential in the support it gave to Nyerere and the nationalist movement in Tanganyika, leading to the independence of that former trust territory in 1961.⁶⁵

Creech Jones continued to advise the Labour Party on its colonial policy. In 1956, together with Rita Hinden, he was on the drafting committee for the policy statement *Labour's Colonial Policy: The Plural Society*, which included a stipulation that transfer of power would only be supported on the basis of a constitution incorporating the principle of one person – one vote.⁶⁶ However, the influence of the FCB was waning, while that of the more radical MCF was growing.⁶⁷ Creech Jones returned to chairing the FCB, renamed the Fabian Commonwealth Bureau in 1959.⁶⁸ He managed to get back into parliament in the 1954 Wakefield by-election, and sat until retiring in August 1964 on the grounds of ill-health. He died two months later. He had ceased chairing the FCB in 1962, when it amalgamated with the Fabian International Bureau.

In his final years he continued to visit many Commonwealth countries, many of which were attaining independence, often as a delegate from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. He retained his other interests, serving as a vice president of the WEA and on the committees of the Ramblers Association and the Youth Hostels Association, and remained involved in the Oxford-based Institute for Commonwealth Studies.

Conclusion

As Patricia Pugh's biographical entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* comments, Creech Jones 'was unimpressive in appearance; he was not a brilliant or witty speaker; but he was one whom the House of Commons greatly respected for his knowledge, integrity, and sincerity.' His former Cabinet colleague Ernest Bevin, in a letter commiserating with Creech Jones on losing his seat in the 1950 election, wrote:

Looking back over the history of colonial development, I do not think anyone has a greater record – the constitutional changes you have carried through, the development of education, the promotion of universities, the constant attention you have given to economic development, the way you have applied your mind to the problems of soil erosion and transport. If only it had been done long ago. What a different world it would have been!

As Robert Pearce, the author of the most detailed study of British colonial policy towards Africa in the war and immediate post-war years put it: 'many people in Britain felt that they had been fighting to keep the Empire intact and had no intention of liquidating it. This makes even more remarkable, and revolutionary, the work of Creech Jones and Cohen at the Colonial Office'.⁶⁹

Why Creech Jones was so influential, given his views on colonial policy were far more progressive than those of his Cabinet colleagues, especially Attlee and Bevin who were both strong defenders of the British Empire? The answer probably has several components. Firstly, Bevin's and Attlee's attention was on other issues, and neither was interested in the details of African colonial administrative arrangements, on which Creech Jones was the acknowledged expert. Secondly the issues concerned rarely reached the Cabinet so there was no high-level discussion of the principles behind the changes. The Cabinet had to deal with significant civil unrest in Palestine, Cyprus and Malaya, while the African colonies were relatively quiet. Creech Jones said little in Cabinet. He was not seen as challenging the political leadership. Thirdly, it does not appear that Attlee, Bevin and other cabinet colleagues really understood the significance of what Creech Jones was doing, and he appeared to want to keep it this way. Had he pressed for more funding, things might have been very different.

There is also the question of how far the reforms were led by Creech Jones, and what part was played by Andrew Cohen and other progressive colonial office officials and governors such as Bernard Bourdillon? While Cohen drafted many of Creech Jones' circulars and speeches, and worked through the technical details, it was Creech Jones who set the overall policy direction and gave Cohen this role, and their relationship is best seen as a partnership. They supported each other when challenged by their more traditionalist colleagues, and it was

Creech Jones who ensured that when the traditionalist governors were due for retirement, that they were replaced by progressives.

There is one further question – were Creech Jones's reforms that radical, or did they just continue the policy of the wartime administrations pursued by Malcolm MacDonald and Oliver Stanley? Was Cohen simply continuing the approach of the Colonial Office's Lord Reith? To some extent, both Creech Jones and Cohen stressed continuity when presenting their proposals to British politicians and officials, while giving a more radical interpretation to African nationalist leaders. To some the reforms to local administration and focus on education for citizenship were seen as too radical, and to others not radical enough. While no timescales were set and progress towards independence was much quicker than either Creech Jones or Cohen had anticipated, the reforms they put forward were intended to lead at some point in time to self-government and independence. The reforms were revolutionary, and intentionally so.

A full biography of Creech Jones is long overdue. This article has concentrated on his approach to the African colonies. There is much which can be said about his role in relation to other colonies for which he had ministerial responsibility, and in the transition of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth. However in relation to policy on the African colonies, we can conclude that while his approach may in hindsight appear paternalistic and at times patronising, his support for Africans governing themselves was indeed novel in a leading British politician and, given his ability to bring his ideas into practice, was revolutionary in terms of both objective and effect.

It is time Creech Jones's positive contribution to decolonisation was recognised. He was a quiet and serious man, clear in his aims but collaborationist and incremental in his means. He had respect for the African populations. He regarded them as friends and partners rather than objects of policy, and as citizens rather than colonial subjects. He lacked the racist and supremacist prejudices held by many colonial governors and administrators and by many of his British political and colleagues across the party-political spectrum. He was consistent in his politics across his political career, whether in or out of parliament, as Minister or backbencher. In his later years he was happy to collaborate with more radical extra-parliamentary initiatives, but was never tempted to support the use of violent means to achieve political change.

It was of course the African nationalist movements and leaders who played the crucial part in achieving independence for their countries. But we should recognise that there was at least one senior British politician who did much to assist and enable these goals to be achieved. Creech Jones helped to initiate a process of decolonisation which subsequent British governments were unable to halt or reverse.

Notes

- 1 Patricia Pugh, 'Arthur Creech Jones' in *Dictionary of National Biography* (accessed online). There is no entry for Creech Jones in the 15-volume *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.
- 2 For the background of radical and socialist politics in Camberwell and Dulwich in this period see Duncan Bowie, *200 Years of Dulwich Radicalism*, London, 2022, pp.13-20.
- 3 John Taylor, 'Against the tide, against the war: conscientious objection in South London 1914-18', on <https://sslh.org.uk/2022/02/12/against-the-tide-against-the-war-conscientious-objection-in-south-london-1914-1918/>
- 4 Arthur Creech Jones, *Prison Reform Now*, London, 1959.
- 5 *The Rubr: Report of a Deputation from the TGWU*, London, 1923, on <https://cdm21047.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/tav/id/2523>
- 6 Clements Kadalie, *My Life and the ICU*, London, 1970, pp.129, 138-140.
- 7 Marion Shaw, *The Clear Stream: A Life of Winifred Holtby*, London, 1999, pp.176-187; Henry Dee, *Militant Migrants*, Liverpool, 2025, pp.175-177, 184, 216-217.
- 8 P. S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-64*, London, 1975, p.226.
- 9 Tingfu Tsiang, *Labor and Empire*, New York, 1923, p.95.
- 10 For a detailed analysis of these statements, see Gupta, *Imperialism*, chapters 1-4.
- 11 Labour Party, *The Empire in Africa: Labour's Policy*, London, 1920.
- 12 Labour Party, *Labour and the Empire in Africa*, London, 1926.
- 13 Labour and Socialist International, *The Colonial Problem*, London and Zurich, 1928. For discussion of Labour Party colonial policy in this period see also Paul Kelemen, 'Modernising Colonialism: The British Labour Movement and Africa', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History*, Vol. 34 No. 2, June 2006, pp.223-244; Paul Kelemen, 'Planning for Africa: The British Labour Party's Colonial Development Policy 1920-1964', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 7 No. 1, January 2007, pp.76-98.
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- 15 Labour Party, *The Demand for Colonial Territories and the Equality of Economic Opportunity*, London, 1936.
- 16 Labour Party, *Commonsense about the Colonies*, London, 1938.
- 17 Arthur Creech Jones, *Trade Unionism Today*, London 1928; John Holford, 'Britain's Forgotten Minister of Education: Arthur Creech Jones and a Socialist Strategy for Development and Education in Africa', *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference May 19-21, 1995, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*, pp.171-176.
- 18 See J. F. Horrabin, 'The Break with Imperialism', in Dr. Christopher Addison, Major C. R. Attlee, H. N. Brailsford, H. R. Clay, G. D. H. Cole, Sir Stafford Cripps, J. F. Horrabin, W. Mellor, Sir Charles Trevelyan, E. F. Wise, *Problems of a Socialist Government*, London, 1933, p.112.
- 19 Gupta, *Imperialism*, p.243.
- 20 Conrad Noel, *The Meaning of Imperialism*, League Against Imperialism, London, n.d.

- 21 Gupta, *Imperialism*, pp.229-230.
- 22 Ibid., pp.250-251.
- 23 Ibid., pp.252-254; Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918-64*, Oxford, 1993.
- 24 Howe, *Anticolonialism*, pp.104, 107, 127.
- 25 Quoted in Gupta, *Imperialism*, p.264.
- 26 Ibid., p.265.
- 27 David Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-1961*, Oxford, 1971, pp.123-129.
- 28 Patricia Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise: 100 Years of Fabian Socialism*, London, 1984, pp.188-199.
- 29 Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues*, p.120.
- 30 National Peace Council, *Freedom for Colonial Peoples*, London, 1942.
- 31 Suki Wolton, *Lord Hailey, the Colonial Office and the Politics of Race and Empire in the Second World War*, Basingstoke, 2000, p.122.
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- 33 Labour Party, *The Colonies: The Labour Party's Post-War Policy for the African and Pacific Colonies*, London, 1943.
- 34 Gupta, *Imperialism*, p.275.
- 35 Rita Hinden, *Plan for Africa*, London, 1941, pp.13-14.
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- 37 Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise*, pp.189-195; Rita Hinden, *Socialism and Empire. Five Years Work of the Fabian Colonial Bureau*, London, 1945.
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- 39 Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise*, p.192.
- 40 Fabian Society, *Fabian Colonial Essays*, London, 1945, pp.82-83.
- 41 Quoted in R. D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa*, London, 1982, pp.91-92.
- 42 Hinden, *Socialism and Empire*.
- 43 Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald. Bringing an End to Empire*, Liverpool, 1995, p.26. See also John Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire*, London, 1997, pp.251-256. Lloyd was Colonial Minister between May 1940 and February 1941, but Charmley's biography covers this very briefly and has no substantive material on his role as Minister.
- 44 Quoted in J. M. Lee, *Colonial Development and Good Government*, Oxford, 1967, p.67.
- 45 There are several papers by Ronald Robinson examining the role of Andrew Cohen, including his relationship with Creech Jones: Ronald Robinson, 'Andrew Cohen and the Transfer of Power in Tropical Africa', in W. H. Morris-Jones and Georges Fischer, eds, *Decolonization and After: The British and French Experience*, London, 1980, pp.50-72; Ronald Robinson, 'Sir Andrew Cohen: Proconsul of African Nationalism' in L. H. Gann and P. Duignan, *African Proconsuls*, New York, 1978, pp.353-366. Cohen also wrote a book setting out his views, based on a set of lectures given in America: Andrew Cohen, *British Policy*

- in a *Changing Africa*, Evanston, 1959. Robinson had intended to write a biography of Cohen, but this was never completed.
- 46 Quoted in R. D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa*, London, 1982, p.100.
- 47 Quoted in *ibid.*, p.102.
- 48 Ronald Hyam, ed., *British Documents on the End of Empire. Series A Volume 2. The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951. Part 1 High Policy and Administration*, London, 1992, pp.119-129.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p.130.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p.131.
- 51 Quoted in Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa*, p.179.
- 52 As shown in a government propaganda film, the delegates visited a farm, a tractor factory and the Bournville chocolate factory in Birmingham. See <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1007>
- 53 Quoted in Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa*, p.181.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp.188-195.
- 55 See Holford, *Britain's Forgotten Minister*.
- 56 Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa*, pp.186-188.
- 57 Arthur Creech Jones, *Labour's Colonial Policy*, London, 1947; see also Arthur Creech Jones, *Some Current Colonial Problems*, London, 1946.
- 58 James Griffiths, Arthur Creech Jones, Rita Hinden, *The Way Forward*, London, 1950, p.15.
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- 60 Arthur Creech Jones, ed., *New Fabian Colonial Essays*, London, 1959, pp.36-37.
- 61 Michael Collins, 'Decolonisation and the "Federal Moment"' in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Vol. 24 No. 1, 2013, pp.21-40; Anne Yates, and Michael Chester, *Troublemaker: A Biography of the Rev Michael Scott*, London, 2006; Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise*, pp.223-224; Gupta, *Imperialism*, pp.339-340; Arthur Creech Jones, *African Challenge: The Fallacy of Federation*, London, 1952.
- 62 Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise*, p.234; Howe, *Anticolonialism*, pp.196-197; Susan Williams, *Colour Bar*, London, 2006, p.265.
- 63 Gupta, *Imperialism*, p.361; Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues*, pp.276-278.
- 64 Pugh, *Educate, Agitate, Organise*, p.234.
- 65 Daniel Smith, *The Influence of the Fabian Colonial Bureau on the Independence Movement in Tanganyika*, Athens OH, 1985.
- 66 Gupta, *Imperialism*, p.368; Labour Party, *Labour's Colonial Policy: The Plural Society*, London, 1956.
- 67 Howe, *Anticolonialism*, pp.231-267; Stan Newens, *Commemorating the 50th anniversary of Liberation, formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom*, London, 2004.
- 68 Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues*, p.233.
- 69 Pearce, *Turning Point in Africa*, p.209.

Fascism, Free Speech and Academic Freedom:

A case study from the 1980s

Michael Newman

Introduction

Questions about academic freedom are currently of crucial political and theoretical concern, particularly as the rise of the right has meant that hostile forces have targeted universities to an unprecedented extent, using the mantra of ‘free speech’ to drive through an agenda against all forms of left-wing protest and critical research and teaching. Above all, the second Trump Presidency has unleashed a wholesale assault on the university sector, including through draconian action against campus protests about Israel’s policies in Gaza, withdrawing funding for Harvard and other ‘Ivy League’ institutions, and deportations of students.¹

The situation in the UK is less dramatic, but aspects of the current situation are very alarming, particularly with the increasing electoral and political threat from Reform UK. Nigel Farage’s populist radical right-wing party, and its various offshoots, have clearly drawn on aspects of Trump’s ‘culture wars’ against the university sector in the United States. In June 2025 Rupert Lowe, the MP for Great Yarmouth, left Reform UK and subsequently formed his own party, Restore Britain, which proclaims that ‘high-culture institutions have been totally captured by anti-British, anti-Western, and anti-white ideological trends such as decolonisation, intersectionality and critical race theory’ and that staff ‘pushing anti-British ideology should hold no position in a publicly funded British university.’² In February 2026, Zia Yusuf, Reform UK’s Spokesperson for Home Affairs, and other party officials, attempted to emulate another aspect of Trump’s assault on universities. They threatened to revoke Bangor University’s funding after the Debating and Political society refused a request by two Reform UK MPs to host a question-and-answer session. The society’s committee defended the decision with a strong statement that it had ‘zero tolerance for any form of racism, transphobia, or homophobia displayed by the members of Reform UK’ and implored others to join them ‘in keeping hate out of universities’.³ This stance was successful, with Reform UK’s Welsh branch later retracting the threat, claiming that stripping funding from Bangor was not official policy. However, the University distanced itself from the action with a post

stressing that students' societies were autonomous, and that the university welcomed debate from across the political spectrum, including Reform UK.⁴ Craven attitudes towards Farage and his associates on questions of free speech and academic freedom will, no doubt, be reinforced by the success of the party in the local election results in May. Yet in one other important case – the Office for Students (OfS) against the University of Sussex – there was a significant advance.

In March 2025, the OfS caused deep concern across the whole university sector by imposing a fine against Sussex university on the issue of gender. While the extent of polarisation and intolerance on the campus had been regrettable, a financial penalty of £585,000 seemed extraordinary. The stated justification for this was partially on the grounds that the university's policy statement on trans and non-binary equality included a requirement to 'positively represent trans people', which could inhibit those with different views from voicing them.⁵ However, the ruling also implied an implicit endorsement of the gender critical position, thereby constraining others with different perspectives. Furthermore, the imposition of this huge fine in relation to one controversial question could obviously lead to self-censorship in other areas, many of which would inevitably be matters of particular concern for the left. In September, the High Court granted Sussex University permission to proceed to a judicial review of the OfS decision.

The result on 29 April 2026 was to quash the fine, with the High Court Judge, Mrs Justice Lieven finding against the regulator's decision on multiple grounds. She ruled that the OfS was biased, had predetermined the outcome, and applied jurisdictional overreach.⁶ This was an almost total vindication of Sussex University and a scathing condemnation of the OfS. In plain language, the judgment was that the regulator had approached the case with a closed mind, using Sussex as a test case to incentivise compliance with a gender critical perspective across the whole sector.

This was a landmark decision, but it is not yet possible to be sure of its impact. Immediately after the decision, the Vice Chancellor of Sussex sought a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education to 'discuss this excoriating judgment and its implications for the higher education sector.' She called for 'a regulator that works with the sector, not against it... and properly understands freedom of speech, academic freedom, lawful commitments to inclusion, and the scope of its own powers'.⁷ However, the meeting does not appear to have taken place.

A further cause for uncertainty concerns the position of Arif Ahmed, the Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom at the OfS. He was not responsible for the decision to initiate the action against Sussex University, which predated his appointment in the summer of 2023. In her judgment in

April, Mrs Justice Lieven exonerated him from the role that he then played in that action mainly because ‘the die had already been cast by then’ and ‘his role was not sufficiently central for any apparent personal bias of his to vitiate the decision.’⁸ Yet the judgement included considerable evidence that Arif’s views on the issue coincided with those of Kathleen Stock, the gender critical lecturer at Sussex, and had corresponded with her before his appointment. Mrs Justice Lieven recorded that, had he been ‘the decision-maker I would in all probability have found that he had predetermined the decision by reason of having a closed mind’.⁹ Ahmed has also been active on other controversial issues – for example, making statements and issuing regulations that suggest steps to limit anti-Israel protests in universities.¹⁰

A year before the judgement in the Sussex case, Peter Scott, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Studies at UCL and former Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University, made a cogent critique of the OfS. After an analytical review of its procedures and judgments in relation to campus protests against Israel on the one hand and the treatment of the transgender issue at Sussex on the other, he concluded that the politically partisan focus on free speech had all the marks of a ‘made in America’ ideology and that:

[T]he same politically partisan focus has actually made it more difficult to have a measured debate about free speech and academic freedom which, very sadly, is badly needed in a world from which reason, trust and mutual respect appear to have fled – and online abuse, fake news and AI have arrived. The OfS report on Sussex, and its disproportionate fine, are – in effect – a blow against rather than a blow in favour of free speech in higher education.¹¹

Although the judgment against the OfS in April 2026 is clearly welcome, it does not in itself do more than reverse a single particularly egregious violation of academic freedom. As Peter Scott has argued in a recent contribution, the political narrative justifying the original Act that established the OfS, was that right-wing or conservative views were being ‘cancelled’. Gender critical views were defined in this way, so they needed to be protected with the full force of the State, while pro-Palestine views, in contrast, needed to be strictly policed or even curbed.¹² At the time of writing, there is little reason for any confidence that this perspective will change in the near future. The government has been silent on the Sussex judgement; the OfS will introduce a new complaints scheme on 1 September for university staff, visiting speakers, and non-student members to raise concerns about the suppression of freedom of speech at English higher education providers; and Arif Ahmed remains its Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

At present, the threats to progressive goals in Higher Education by simplifying the complexities of academic freedom and manipulating the discourse of 'free speech' to advance right-wing political agendas may be particularly acute, but they are certainly not new. The focus of this article is on an historical case study of fascism, free speech and academic freedom in the mid-1980s in the Polytechnic of North London (PNL). This has both intrinsic importance and interest and some crucial lessons for the current era.

The case concerned a student, Patrick Harrington, who was also an official, organiser and activist in the youth section of the National Front (NF). Enrolled as a BA (Hons) Combined History and Philosophy student at PNL in 1982, his presence at the institution led to a major crisis.¹³ The main protests began in February 1984, but quickly escalated, with mass picketing preventing his entry into the Kentish Town campus of the Polytechnic. Soon the police and the High Court were involved and, over the next nine months, many students were arrested and two were imprisoned. Fourteen academic staff were brought before the High Court on contempt charges, and PNL descended into near chaos, with a serious threat of closure. Neither before nor since have there been protests about racism and fascism in a British institution of Higher Education on anything approaching this scale. Finally, in January 1985, a new acting Director implemented a deal that stabilised the situation, although protests against Harrington continued.

The article explains why the affair had such devastating consequences. It begins by setting the context, for many aspects of the situation can be understood only by appreciating the nature and history of the institution. It then focuses on the early stages up to May 1984, suggesting that the major controversies about individual freedom of expression and the right to education within wider concepts of academic freedom were all raised in this period. It argues that a workable solution was proposed, but that the involvement of the High Court proved a major barrier to any such resolution. The article then considers the professional position of academic staff in relation to their students, arguing that both the courts and the Polytechnic management undermined this. The fourth part argues that a solution was possible only by addressing the anti-racism and anti-fascism behind the students' determination to continue direct action. It emphasises the importance of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in bringing about a significant advance in this respect. Finally, a conclusion reflects on the current relevance of the episode.

The nature and evolution of PNL: 1971-1983

PNL was one of the new polytechnics created for England, Wales and Northern Ireland after the Labour government established a 'binary' system of higher

education in the 1960s, with both a university and polytechnic sector. In general, the new institutions brought together various colleges that previously existed under local authority control, most of which had a greater proportion of vocational and part-time courses than traditional universities. In 1965, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was also established to validate the qualifications in the polytechnics and other non-university higher education institutions.¹⁴ However, the system of control, validation of degrees and governance arrangements changed very extensively over the next twenty-five years. In a series of transformations, national control over funding and degree awards was established, and new managerial systems introduced.¹⁵

In 1988, the removal of local authority involvement paved the way for the abolition of the binary system. In 1993 most of the new polytechnics, including PNL, became universities, but this was not the last change, for in 2002, in a further merger, the University of North London and London Guildhall University came together as London Metropolitan University. The Harrington Affair erupted at time when the pace of change was particularly rapid and in circumstances that were already very fraught.

Established in 1971 from the merger of two existing polytechnics, Northern Polytechnic and the North Western Polytechnic, PNL included a variety of levels of qualifications, but the northern campus in Holloway Road was closer to the general image of the new polytechnics as more technologically and vocationally inclined than traditional universities. North Western Polytechnic, two miles away in Kentish Town, had focused largely on the Humanities, but included a social studies faculty in Ladbroke House in Highbury Grove, which was near Holloway Road. Creating a coherent new entity would always have been challenging, but the appointment of Terence Miller as the first Director meant that PNL began with a baptism of fire.

He had been Principal of University College, Rhodesia from 1967 until 1969 – that is, during the years of illegal minority white rule. He had no previous experience of an inner-city Polytechnic, and, in the aftermath of May 1968, he was a surprising choice. There was a very active student left, particularly in Ladbroke House, and his appointment led to immediate occupations, with polarisation reinforced by his management approach.¹⁶

Ladbroke House was at the forefront of these disputes, particularly in the departments of Sociology and Applied Social Studies. Caroline Cox, who would soon become Head of Sociology, was a supporter of the Director, and became a leading campaigner against the left in higher education in general, and sociology in particular – views which she outlined in a co-authored book.¹⁷ The internal conflicts and student occupations led to a negative image of PNL, particularly in the right-wing press. This was also because the PNL student body included a high proportion of mature students with non-standard educational

backgrounds and there was also considerable ethnic diversity, with a high proportion of black and minority ethnic students. The older students, particularly in Humanities and Social Studies, tended to be more political and less deferential than the more typical school leavers in traditional universities.¹⁸ All this was of great salience in the subsequent 'Harrington Affair'. At the same time, PNL also conformed to many of the key aspirations of the Labour Government when creating these institutions.¹⁹ It had a commitment to a student-centred curriculum and pedagogy, with flexible structures, which challenged the traditional domination of single subjects. The 'access' mission and innovative teaching and course development were generally taken very seriously.

When Miller retired in 1980, there was an opportunity for a new Director to foster and develop these aspects of the institution, which were also supported by ILEA on the governing body. However, Miller's successor was Dr David MacDowall, a scholar of Ancient History and a former civil servant, who had been Master of University College, Durham University. In his own retrospective account of his time at PNL, he acknowledged that he had never previously stepped inside a Polytechnic and was unaware of the governance systems of the new institutions.²⁰ He was thus a second surprising choice to assume the leadership of PNL and was unprepared for the pressures that he would face.

The previous year, the Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher, had won the General Election and her agenda would have major implications for Higher Education, both through neoliberalism and other components of 'new right' ideology, personified in the Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph. He had been a leading figure in the right-wing 'think tank', the Centre for Policy Studies, which he had co-founded with Thatcher (and Alfred Sherman) in 1974. He was determined to counter what he saw as undue Marxist influence in higher education, especially in social studies departments in the Polytechnic sector.²¹ After leaving PNL in 1977, Caroline Cox became an associate of Joseph's in the Centre for Policy Studies, and was appointed a Life Peer in the House of Lords in late 1982, taking the title Baroness Cox in March 1983.

In December 1982, one of her former colleagues in Sociology at PNL resigned and on 20 February 1983, wrote to Sir Denis Rooke, the Chairman of the CNAA with a copy to Joseph. In her letter, she made several allegations, including that there was 'a hegemonic power of Marxists and "fellow travellers" in the School', 'irregularities of behaviour and practice', 'Marxist bias in teaching' and 'academic bias and looseness in the new submission for a degree in Applied Social Studies and Sociology'.²² As a result an inspection was set in train by the CNAA. This endorsed the continuation of both courses, clearing them of the charges, but Joseph then announced that Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) would also carry out an inspection. This took place in April/May, with their report published in October 1983.²³ Although this included positive

comments on PNL's provision, there were also significant criticisms. Arguably, these could have been challenged on methodological grounds, but the net result was, rather, to exacerbate the attacks upon PNL as a focal point for a wider policy agenda in relation to higher education.²⁴ As Harold Silver put it, however debatable the evidence, the public impact and what was made of it 'added to the impression of higher education adrift, of dark forces at work, of incompetence, of failure'.²⁵ It was in this atmosphere that the Harrington crisis erupted a few months later. Any institution would have found the challenges difficult to handle, but the fact that they led to the threatened closure or dismemberment of PNL also raised questions about governance and leadership.

Emerging problems

Patrick Harrington was initially admitted to a joint Honours Degree in Philosophy and History in September 1982. It subsequently became clear that he had been an activist and an official in the NF from an early age, as would later be shown in an extensive sworn witness statement submitted to the High Court by an academic expert on the NF.²⁶ Harrington's assessment performance during his first year was mediocre and he kept a low profile in the institution.²⁷ However, the student newspaper (*Fuse*) published an article in April 1983 about NF activities in North London, which included a photo from which some students recognised Harrington, and the identification was corroborated by *Searchlight*, the anti-fascist magazine. In June 1983, *Fuse* carried a second article describing him as 'a leading member of the National Front'.²⁸

After this article, on 7 July, during the summer vacation and after the completion of his exams, both Harrington and his solicitor wrote to the PNL Director, David MacDowall, complaining that his examination preparation had been adversely affected by the students' response to his being identified as an NF activist.²⁹ The solicitor's letter argued that the *Fuse* article was 'defamatory to our client in the extreme and has caused him to be extremely concerned about the future of his studies at the Polytechnic'. It also claimed that he was *not* a leading member of the National Front, 'as the most elevated position that he has ever held in that organisation is secretary of the local Wandsworth Branch' and it rejected the other allegations. But it also reported that he 'anticipates that the hostility engendered may turn to violence, or at the very least harassment'. It asked for the Director's assurance 'that you and your staff will use their best endeavours to take such steps as will allow our client to continue his studies peacefully'.³⁰

The key aspect of this letter was that it established the narrative that Harrington simply wanted to concentrate on his education, that his 'private' political views were irrelevant, and that he was the victim of intolerance by those

infringing his rights. The Assistant Director for Personnel, replied with an assurance to Harrington's solicitor that:

...the Polytechnic would under no circumstances discriminate against a student on account of his or her political beliefs or activities provided that there [was] no breach of the Polytechnic's Code of Conduct.³¹

It also stated that it had every intention of ensuring that he was allowed to continue his studies peacefully without any harassment.

Despite these clear warnings of impending problems in the summer of 1983, no further action at Directorate level appears to have been taken until the crisis erupted in March 1984 and a subsequent Committee of Inquiry was critical of this:

...it is hard to understand why, in the summer of 1983, the matter was apparently seen as something to keep an eye on rather than as a continuing threat to the institution, requiring a great deal of discussion with all concerned, of the issues, possible solutions and the consequences of various courses of action by individuals or management.³²

Harrington attended few lectures or seminars during the first semester of his second year and did not fulfil all his assessment requirements. In February 1984 he was informed in writing that his attendance was unsatisfactory, but he was allowed to transfer to a single subject degree in Philosophy from the beginning of the second semester in February.³³

Very soon after this, some students took their evidence of his NF activities to the Philosophy staff, saying that they did not want to share their seminars and lectures with Harrington as they felt threatened by his presence and concerned that the information about them could be passed on to the NF, and some members of academic staff agreed with this stance. On 8 March pickets prevented him from attending his lectures, with the numbers growing during the day.³⁴ The Kentish Town branch of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) put their case to the Director, David MacDowall. They proposed that Harrington should be offered separate tuition, but that if he refused, he should be expelled from PNL. After discussion in which various views were expressed, a meeting of NATFHE in Kentish Town on 15 March 1984 unanimously agreed a motion stating that the Branch:

- (i) Expresses its grave concern at the presence of a prominent and active member of the National Front as a student at Kentish Town.
- (ii) Expresses its strong support for the students who feel offended and intimidated by his presence in classes, and for the Philosophy Staff.

(iii) Calls upon the Court of Governors and the Directorate to develop as a matter of urgency a Polytechnic anti-racist policy, and to take the circumstances of this case into account when doing so.³⁵

What was the relationship between such arguments and the liberal perspective, widely regarded as central to the philosophy of higher education in the UK? The *dominant* interpretation held that Harrington's individual rights to freedom of expression and to higher education should be the primary, perhaps the only, criterion, and that his political views and activities were largely irrelevant. The opposing viewpoint by many student activists in the 'Harrington out' campaign was that his role in the NF, which practised violence and extreme racism, meant that he forfeited all claims to education at PNL. However, this position was not put forward by the academic staff concerned, and nor was it the policy of the NATFHE branches in the institution that was put to the Director. Instead, their assumption was, in effect, that Harrington retained his educational rights, but only in a qualified and limited form because of his NF affiliations and actions. The Philosophy staff were effectively offering private tuition alongside their regular teaching, thereby increasing their workloads in support of such a solution. At this stage there was still a reasonable chance that a compromise of this kind might have succeeded, but events were now moving very fast.

As the number of pickets grew at PNL, the Philosophy staff agreed to provide separate, private tuition for Harrington, and separate examinations.³⁶ At first, in a meeting with the Assistant Director and his Head of Department on 9 March 1984, Harrington appeared willing to accept alternative teaching arrangements.³⁷ However, he soon changed his mind. On 4 April his solicitors warned that proceedings would be taken against PNL unless assurances about his teaching were given. The Polytechnic was asked to give undertakings by 11 April to secure Harrington's access to lectures and to discipline any students preventing this. Moreover, his solicitors sought the names of certain Student Union office holders and the Socialist Worker Student Society (SSWSS) officials so that they could be named in proceedings.³⁸ PNL's solicitors made various compromise proposals but these were all rejected on 12 April. The solicitors' letters on behalf of the institution implied a belief that the crisis would not be resolved by use of disciplinary measures and mentioned the possibility of extending the current arrangement of private tuition.³⁹ However, the Directorate was not prepared to consider any 'ultimatum' for Harrington to accept the alternative teaching option, as proposed by the Philosophy staff and endorsed at the NATFHE meeting. A writ of summons was issued against PNL and against one student on his own behalf and that of other picketing students. With this, the probability of a compromise solution disappeared.

Harrington used the arguments for free speech and the right to education; the case was heard on 25 April and resulted in orders against the individual

student, the Secretary of SWSS, the President of the Students' Union and the editor of *Fuse*, while the order against PNL was adjourned. The Directorate accepted Harrington's case despite the internal consequences, and the most intransigent advocates of the 'Harrington out' movement amongst the students became more dominant.

The background to the SWP's involvement in the 'Harrington affair' and the changes in the NF are both relevant. By the early 1980s, the NF had declined considerably in national popularity since its peak and was now splintering into rival factions, and some of these sought to revive its fortunes through confrontations with the SWP, in particular locations.⁴⁰ One such arena was Chapel Street market in Islington and it was there that the photo of Harrington carried in the *Fuse* article had been taken. According to the subsequent Committee of Inquiry, the first picket on 8 March of about twelve people which prevented Harrington's entry into PNL, 'was said to be organised by members of the Socialist Workers Student Society'.⁴¹ However, it was Philosophy students who initially raised the alarm about Harrington's presence, and the action very soon escalated far beyond the SWP, particularly after the High Court became involved. Approximately 70 students joined the pickets during March, but the momentum then built up very rapidly.⁴² After the first High Court judgments on 25 April it seemed unstoppable and on 1 May there was a picket of about 150 and, in the words of the inquiry, 'photographs were taken by an acquaintance of Mr Harrington'.⁴³ The action then spiralled out of control. With its organisational experience, SWP/SWSS soon played a key role and Harrington was keen to claim that the campaign against him was orchestrated by this organisation, but it was always actively supported by numerous students who did not share the SWP's views.

The intensity of the protests was exacerbated by a growing awareness of 'institutional racism' in many sectors of society, including at PNL and in education in general, and this was reinforced by repressive policing against black communities in inner-cities, particularly London, where the 'Brixton riots' occurred in April 1981.⁴⁴ All this fuelled the campaign within PNL and on 10 May, a Student Union Emergency General Meeting (EGM) at the Kentish Town campus of PNL passed a motion to occupy the building. The next day the High Court made a further Order directing its Tipstaff, a court officer, and his agents (the police), to enter the building and arrest anyone in breach of the 25 April Order, on Contempt of Court charges.⁴⁵ There was an occupation and on 17 May, when Harrington had further scheduled classes, the Tipstaff, with police, broke into the building to ensure that he was able to access his classes. Five days later, when he was again scheduled to attend lectures, the relevant lecturers telephoned in to report illness. The High Court judge (now Justice Mars-Jones)

stated that he expected the provision of alternative classes relevant for Harrington's course.

At the demonstration following Harrington's departure at the end of the lecture, seven arrests were made with all defendants appearing in Court on charges of obstructing the police and using threatening words and behaviour. When the other Philosophy students made it clear that they would boycott the examinations if they had to take them in the same room as Harrington, PNL undertook to send him 'a comprehensive package' of lecture notes for the classes he had missed, and his examinations were deferred for two weeks.⁴⁶ However, neither the courts nor the PNL management had any success in restraining student protests; and the next academic year promised to see a further escalation. Meanwhile, however, a completely new dimension had opened up when a group of academic staff were drawn into the legal conflict with the High Court.

PNL academic staff and academic freedom

By mid-May, the High Court actions and behaviour of the PNL Directorate already appeared to many to have undermined internal authority structures and relationships of trust to such an extent that the viability of the institution was threatened.⁴⁷

Twenty photographs of students picketing on 1 May had been marked with a cross and presented to the Court by Harrington's solicitor and the PNL was instructed to identify them. At a meeting of the Court of Governors on 10 May, the PNL solicitor warned that any breach of the Court Orders would be treated as Contempt of Court; moreover, he warned the meeting that if the PNL broke its contract with Harrington, such action would be regarded as *ultra vires* and members of the Governors would be personally liable and could face fines or imprisonment. Following Harrington's legal demands, the Director's response was to instruct a group of staff with departmental and course responsibilities from the Faculties of Humanities and Social Studies to come to the Holloway Road campus to make the identification. When they arrived, he and the Polytechnic Solicitor confined them in two separate rooms and told them that they would stay there until they agreed to identify the students. The staff believed that this was unacceptable and probably illegal and, eventually, after the intervention of NATFHE headquarters, they were allowed to leave.

Because of the nature of the student populations in the Humanities and Social Studies Faculties, and the pedagogic ethos, student/staff relations tended to be close and based on trust. Whatever their individual beliefs about mass pickets preventing Harrington's entry, most staff therefore recoiled from an instruction to identify students either to the Director or to the High Court at the behest of the NF. However, a few days later, on 18 May, a large group of

academic staff from the two faculties were instructed to attend a meeting with the Directorate and the PNL's solicitor and, when approximately sixty-five did so, they were issued with court orders and instructed to examine the relevant photos and attempt to identify the students. This was a very emotionally charged meeting, with one lecturer recalling the fate of her mother in Auschwitz and tearing up the court order, and the Polytechnic solicitor insisting on the identification. David Triesman, the new National Negotiating Secretary of NATFHE, then persuaded the PNL management that staff should be permitted to seek their own legal advice, but this was mainly a delaying tactic. However, when, on 21 May, court orders were served on two Heads of Department and twelve course tutors, 11 of the 14 defendants preferred to be represented in Court by privately engaged solicitors rather than by NATFHE because they believed that the support for their case by its central organisation had been inadequate.⁴⁸

When these members of the academic staff appeared in the High Court before Justice Mars-Jones, all their counter arguments were dismissed, although they were permitted to go to the Court of Appeal. However, this also rejected their case, although the role of the Tipstaff was criticised.⁴⁹ Finally, in late September in the High Court, a different Judge, Justice Kennedy, again refused to uphold the case of the staff, but acted pragmatically. Noting that events at the PNL had been quiet for four months, he ruled that it would no longer be helpful to require them to make the identifications, and this removed the immediate threat of imprisonment of staff for Contempt of Court. However, he also stated that the order could be reactivated if students refused to comply with earlier judgments.⁵⁰

While the High Court and Polytechnic Director had attempted to deal with protests through escalating forms of discipline and sanctions, the fundamental driver of the action was opposition to the NF. Without concrete moves to recognise the legitimacy of anti-racist and anti-fascist protest, there was a deadlock.

Polytechnic governance and anti-racism

The ILEA recognised the necessity, both on prudential and principled grounds, for PNL to address the issue of alleged racism in relation to Harrington. Since the late 1970s, the ILEA had taken considerable steps both to recognise institutional racism in schools and to establish codes of practice to implement the 1976 Race Relations Act in the institutions it controlled.⁵¹ Although this constituted a significant advance, the immediate effects at PNL were unpromising: the ILEA and staff Governors sought firmer action but the Directorate maintained its existing position.⁵²

On 18 May Neil Fletcher, chair of the ILEA's Further and Higher Education Committee, had gone to the site where students were carrying out a mass picket

and told them that the ILEA supported the proposal for separate teaching to be provided for Harrington and also backed the teaching staff in refusing to identify student pickets. He praised PNL's record of recruiting black students and said that thanks were due to those who had drawn attention to the dangers of racism and far Right organisations.⁵³ He also believed that the introduction of a new code of practice on racism and guidelines for complaints should be introduced as a matter of urgency, and that all students should be required to give an undertaking that they would respect the ILEA policies for supporting the development of a multi-ethnic society.⁵⁴

A series of Special Meetings of the Governors then took place during the summer, where the differences between the ILEA and the Director, supported by the Chair of Governors, John Diamond, intensified. On 16 May, MacDowall, with Diamond, went to a meeting at the ILEA headquarters where they met its barrister, Alexander (Derry) Irvine, who would later become Lord Chancellor in the 1997 Labour Government. Irvine advised that the Director would not be in contempt of court if Harrington was offered the best possible alternative educational arrangements and denied facilities or access to PNL beyond them. The ILEA officially advised that immediate discussions should be held with Harrington and staff unions about implementing these alternative arrangements, and on the same day Diamond issued a formal notice for a Special Meeting of the Governors on 21 May with the ILEA's advice attached. However, there were quite different pressures from the right. Three days before the scheduled Special Meeting, the *Times* published an editorial entitled 'Totalitarian Nursery', which concluded that, if the Polytechnic managers would not prosecute the students who were breaking academic discipline, 'the sooner this rather sad institution rids itself not only of the troublemakers but also of those loose intellectually substandard courses where ... they have congregated, the better'.⁵⁵ On same day, a new notification of the special meeting was issued and, at Diamond's request, a copy of the editorial in *The Times* was attached to the notification.

At the Special Meeting on 21 May a proposal for a Joint Committee of ILEA and PNL Governors to advise on the continuing problems was agreed. The co-Chairs were Neil Fletcher and John Diamond. However, this potentially positive development was overtaken by events. By the time the meeting on anti-racist policy was held on 2 July, the lecturers' case had already been rejected at both the High Court and the Court of Appeal. A new disciplinary code and an anti-racist policy were agreed, but the Court cases, and accompanying media attention, had intensified, rather than diminished, the divisions within the Governing body.

The new disciplinary code included a wide range of offences, including sexual harassment, racist activity or behaviour that caused fear or distress to others

or interfered with legitimate freedom of speech and it also prohibited breaches of the Polytechnic Equal Opportunities Policies. The anti-racist policy affirmed PNL's belief in 'the equal treatment of all human beings, regardless of their sex, colour, race, nationality, birthplace, religious, or political views'; its opposition to any form of racial discrimination; and its recognition that the diversity of cultures was 'a resource of great value to an educational institution'. It also asserted that 'in dealing with any incident of racism or racial discrimination, the Polytechnic will take appropriate disciplinary or legal action'.⁵⁶ In principle, this was a step of great importance, but in practice it made no difference to the continuing battle within the Court of Governors.

On 22 June, the Director wrote to the *Daily Telegraph*, distancing himself from the most extreme critics of PNL such as Baroness Cox, for paying:

...scant regard to the general body of the Polytechnic's teachers ... whose achievements have won commendation from the Council of Academic Awards and Her Majesty's Inspectors and ... does not mention the pioneering work ... in widening access to higher education and catering for the special needs of ethnic minorities in London. Nor does she throw much light on the complex issues raised by the Harrington case.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, he maintained that the prime need was to promulgate a student code of conduct setting out such rights as freedom of speech on campus, coupled with obligations to respect the rights of others and to avoid disruption. He also maintained that the new code should cover lecturer/student relations, distinguishing between confidential information and what must be disclosed to the proper authorities. There was thus still a gulf between the Director and the ILEA, and on 19 July a delegation of staff governors met the Chair and Vice Chair to report a further worsening of relationships between the Director and the institution's academic staff.⁵⁸ No significant progress was made by the beginning of the next academic year.

Deepening Crisis and Partial Resolution, October 1984-January 1985

The crisis soon spun out of control, with the escalation starting with a student union EGM on 4 October. The motion called for a picket both inside and outside the building whenever Harrington attended a lecture, and a total boycott of all lectures at such times. The next day, when he arrived at the Kentish Town site of PNL, there was a mass picket and a large police presence and his solicitor immediately asked for new Court Orders.⁵⁹

Many students believed it was vital to continue the action, while the majority of staff feared that further illegal action threatened the future of the institution. Similarly, the Kentish Town NATFHE branch expressed total opposition to the policy adopted by the EGM, as both divisive and making it harder to achieve 'our major objective of a strong anti-racist policy and code of practice that ensures its implementation'.⁶⁰ The National Union of Students (NUS) also took this view.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the student action intensified, with further picketing of other PNL buildings, and arrests, culminating in the imprisonment, on 29 November 1984, of two students for 16 days for Contempt of Court. Rather than containing the student action within Humanities and Social Studies, the attempt to divert teaching elsewhere provoked occupations of other PNL buildings, with students who had not previously been involved, now also arrested. By 12 December, possession of all the premises was regained by a Court Order, with police assistance.⁶² Yet there was every reason to believe that the action would start again in January.

The role of the ILEA now became crucial in the face of a very real threat to the future of PNL. The staff governors were invited to a meeting with Neil Fletcher and a group of PNL NATFHE officers to a meeting with Frances Morrell, the ILEA leader. It was made clear in both meetings that the institution was on the brink of closure or dismemberment and that immediate and radical action was needed. Both the ILEA's intervention, and a threat to the funding of the PNL Students' Union, put pressure on all parties to focus on possible ways out of the impasse.⁶³ Of equal importance, Harrington now acted in a way that undermined the credibility of the case that he was an innocent victim of intolerant forces.

In a television interview, he declared that black students at PNL should be 'gradually repatriated' and that black people could not be regarded as legitimate citizens. In response to a supplementary suggestion that he was talking of curtailing civil liberties along racial lines, he argued that 'I don't believe black people can be citizens of Britain, and therefore as citizens are the only ones who have rights, their rights are non-existent'.⁶⁴ One student formally complained and subsequently seventeen members of staff in the Sociology Department called upon the Director to suspend Harrington. He was unwilling to do so on procedural grounds, but he formally reprimanded Harrington for his racist remarks.

The ILEA had no powers to dismiss the Director, but Frances Morrell 'persuaded' him to resign in a deal under which he was given a sabbatical year before taking early retirement.⁶⁵ In a letter to the staff governors on 13 December, MacDowall acknowledged that Morrell had exerted great pressure and also that, when his position on the Harrington investigation was made known to the ILEA, a senior officer there had asked him to attend an urgent meeting where he would be offered enhanced early retirement and he had accepted this.⁶⁶

The situation still appeared perilous as there were ongoing High Court hearings for contempt against sixteen named students, and for the sequestration of PNL's assets in view of its alleged breach of an earlier High Court Order. Nor had there been agreement to a further application by PNL for alternative teaching for Harrington. No concrete progress had thus been made by the end of the term, but behind the scenes, there was a very significant change. While the ILEA could not directly appoint a successor, Morrell had a 'man of the moment' in Dr John Beishon, who was then the Director of South Bank Polytechnic. At the same time, the ILEA sought to stabilise PNL by establishing a Committee of Inquiry into the effectiveness of its internal management and organisation. The ILEA made it clear that the future of PNL depended upon acceptance of both Beishon as Acting Director and the Committee of Inquiry. This was formally agreed on 19 December 1984.⁶⁷

Beishon had been a member of the Communist Party until 1955, and had a doctorate in Psychology. He understood left-wing activism and had a reputation for resolving disputes through unorthodox and sometimes ruthless methods.⁶⁸ He was well aware of the events at PNL and on 14 December 1984 was asked to meet William (Bill) Stubbs, the ILEA Education Officer responsible for Higher Education. He recalled that Stubbs had said that:

...PNL was at the end of the road, the ILEA feared that Sir Keith Joseph was waiting for the opportunity to close PNL and the recent judgement in the High Court had given him the justification to do this. The ILEA had responsibility for PNL and had a commitment to providing the kind of open access to higher education that London needed and deserved. Closure of PNL would be a disaster for educational provision in north London...⁶⁹

Beishon agreed to take the job provided that he could bring his own team with him, and this was also agreed.⁷⁰

His combination of decisiveness and unusual methods proved crucial in re-establishing control of the situation. Eventually, a stratagem was devised under which all the other students were given 'alternative teaching' while Harrington received the official timetabled classes alone in another building. Beishon also took one other decisive initiative: he secured a High Court ruling that Harrington should be prevented from addressing a Student Union meeting on the grounds that this could precipitate violence.⁷¹ This may have helped to persuade some of the student protesters that Beishon was making moves in their direction. His compromise solution just about held until Harrington finished his degree in the summer, although many students continued with peaceful protests.

The changes in culture, policy formulation and overall ethos at PNL, initiated by Beishon and his colleagues, and instigated by senior figures at the ILEA, marked a step change – a real transformation at PNL. For example, the

legitimacy of the student voice was recognised, and policies on racism and sexism, which had been formally adopted, were now implemented.⁷² After 1985, PNL also became far more embedded at local level, involving the multiple communities of north London. New degrees and research activities were established in such areas as Irish Studies and Caribbean Studies, and a Cyprus Centre was established. There were also important initiatives in Women's Studies, Child Abuse and Trade Union Studies. In many other areas professional and training courses were developed. There were several advances, not least in anti-racism and balancing the right to free speech with a broader conception of academic freedom.

Conclusions and reflections for today

There were some specific reasons for the eruption and severity of the crisis over the 'Harrington affair' at PNL, including its own earlier development, location, and student and staff composition. It also took place at a crucial juncture in UK history as the Thatcher government broke with the postwar era of 'consensus' politics. In addition to the ideological and economic aspects of this new phase, the Thatcher government introduced greater national control over local institutions, as well as more powerful internal management systems, which would soon also affect the whole university system.

There have been enormous changes in Higher Education since then as well as in the external political environment in which it operates. In 1984-85, the context was primarily national, but, as Maria Slowey and Richard Taylor have demonstrated in their recent book, many features of the policies towards universities initially pioneered by the Thatcher government have now been internationalised.⁷³ Beyond this, right-wing and far right populist policies, promoted by the second Trump Presidency, affect the whole climate of working and studying within the university sector. Questions about fascism, academic freedom and free speech threatened the very existence of PNL four decades ago, but there is little doubt that the context is now both more complex and threatening than it was then. Yet there are also some significant continuities.

Those attacking PNL in the Harrington affair, and particularly those on the right, constantly focused on the protection of free speech and debate, above all in an institution of Higher Education, as the only relevant principle involved. The policy objectives of the current US administration include numerous threatening components, but they continue to highlight the centrality of free speech. This is clearly absurd when the Trump Presidency is simultaneously suppressing the expression of critical and left-wing perspectives whilst promoting those of the populist right, but it highlights the fact that free speech has

particular resonance. It is generally regarded as a central element within the crucially important, but contested and elusive, concept of 'academic freedom'.⁷⁴

When the OfS was established in 2018, it seemed encouraging that it included academic freedom, but its definition was weak and demonstrated that free speech was really the key concern.⁷⁵ Peter Scott has discussed the tensions within the realm of academic freedom in an illuminating essay and his exploration of the concept historically, theoretically and practically provides some important insights for a consideration of both the Harrington Affair and the current situation.⁷⁶ First, he insists that academic freedom must always be seen in context. To view it as an abstract ideal or natural right is unhelpful, for it is always lodged within a broader hinterland, encompassing both the changing nature of higher education and the wider social and political environment that shapes it. Similarly, while emphasising the centrality of free speech, he is sceptical of attempts to universalise it in all situations, for there will always be dissent about its practical application.

Of course, there are absolutists about free speech, including some prominent libertarians on the left, but John Stuart Mill's classic text, *On Liberty* was cited more frequently in 1984-85, both inside and outside PNL, as the key guide to freedom of speech and expression. Critics of the student activists and the staff who became involved argued that that Mill's text categorically proscribed such behaviour. However, the political philosopher, Alan Haworth, who was then one of the staff instructed to teach Harrington privately, has argued that this was based on a misrepresentation of Mill's work.⁷⁷ In reality, the majority of staff in the two faculties, and probably numerous students, believed that freedom of expression, discussion and enquiry should be central values within an institution of Higher Education. However, their view, which was eventually accepted by the John Beishon, the new Acting Director, in January 1985 was that this did not entail the acceptance of Harrington's *full educational rights on the same basis as for all other students*. The interests and feelings of security of others in a multi-ethnic and diverse academic community required some limitation of his educational rights. This may not have been a clear principle, but it subsequently led to the development of an anti-racist code of practice and more general anti-discriminatory policies. In my view, this outcome was an advance in terms of overall academic freedom, for it recognised the rights of all members of the academic community within the institution. By extension, I would argue that continuing advances in anti-racism and other spheres of discrimination and inequality in all Higher Education institutions, should also be regarded as enlarging, rather than restricting, academic freedom.

Academic freedom, Scott argues, cannot be treated as if it stands aside from the full range of human rights, in particular free speech, enjoyed by all citizens in a democracy, but it also has two special features. First, academics, both as

teachers and researchers, need the maximum degree of freedom to pursue their disciplines, however uncomfortable that may be for others. Secondly, the autonomy of universities needs to be safeguarded alongside other key institutions in civil society, but with special attention because of their responsibility to promote critical enquiry to probe the frontiers of existing knowledge.⁷⁸ Both of these freedoms were curtailed during the course of the Harrington Affair.

When the academic staff refused to identify the student protesters to the Polytechnic authorities or the courts, their freedom to pursue their disciplines and the promotion of critical enquiry may not have been at the forefront of their minds as *specific* motivations for their actions. Many of them were active researchers, but the more immediate considerations were the protection of trust in the pedagogic relationship and an unwillingness to divulge information to the NF that might endanger students. This preservation of the professional role of teachers in Higher Education may also be considered an aspect of academic freedom, but it is unlikely that the academic staff would have been able to distinguish between their relationship with students on the one hand and the pursuit of their disciplines and the promotion of critical knowledge on the other. During the crisis there was thus an embryonic understanding of academic freedom, which held that, in a case of this kind, neither the Polytechnic authorities nor the High Court should be able to insist that staff acted as instructed. This leads to Scott's second point – the need for university autonomy.

A fundamental feature of the Harrington Affair was the complete erosion of PNL's autonomy at a very early stage in the crisis. From early March 1984, when the protests against Harrington's presence were still very small, the law courts ruled against the solution of alternative private tuition. At this time the PNL management favoured this expedient and would later suggest it again, but it was constantly rejected by the High Court. Yet the arrangement instituted in January 1985, after the change in PNL's leadership, was, *in practice*, almost identical with that proposed ten months earlier. By then, of course, the institution had only narrowly escaped closure. It is, of course, impossible to say whether an early implementation of the compromise solution would have avoided the constant escalation of the crisis, but it offered the greatest likelihood. However, this leads to one further point, which is not explicitly considered in Scott's discussion: the fact that the key policy change was ultimately brought about by direct action, including violent confrontations.

The Court's judgements and the passivity of the PNL management strengthened the most intransigent forces amongst the students. As the Judges and Polytechnic management complied with Harrington's injunctions, the SWP and SWSS, as experienced and organised movements, played a more dominant within the student action. The ILEA eventually brought about a change of management, but this was only after the escalating illegal direct action by students

had made the institution ungovernable. The *outcome* of these confrontations was an advance in academic freedom, but it is more problematic to argue that this was also the case with the *methods*. This, however, raises wider general questions about the relationship between legal and extra-legal action in bringing about change, which will not be pursued here.

This article has argued that the overall impact of the Harrington Affair was positive in furthering the cause of anti-racism and anti-fascism within PNL and its successor institutions, but there were also significant limitations and weaknesses, which contain lessons and warnings.

First, although PNL had already existed for thirteen years in 1984, there were historical, geographical and political tensions which had not been managed successfully. As the subsequent ILEA inquiry demonstrated, the Harrington Affair then vastly exacerbated all the existing problems. There are, of course, always tensions and conflicts within all institutions of Higher Education, many of which are both inevitable and positive, but there also need to be elements of cohesion and a sense of an academic community. More generally, it is self-evident that crises and external attacks can have devastating effects on institutions with ineffective systems of governance and deep of internal conflicts, as for example, demonstrated by the turmoil at the BBC. It is currently difficult to build resilient systems of internal governance in universities, which foster the necessary degree of internal cohesion, after years of under-funding, managerialism, casualisation of the academic staff, and instrumental approaches to both the curriculum and research. Yet failure to do so holds real dangers given the external threats and pressures.

Secondly, PNL's ability to withstand the crisis in 1984 was also weakened by its relative lack of external support. Although the ILEA was strongly represented in the Court of Governors, the ongoing disputes between this body, whose function was to serve the interests of inner London and its peoples, and the Director of the Polytechnic, intensified during the crisis. Under the Education Reform Act, which removed local authority control over Polytechnics, the ILEA ceased to have this involvement in PNL and its successor institutions. National control over the whole university sector has vastly increased since then, but local support and embeddedness in the local economy and local community are surely important buttresses of support and alliance for all Higher Education institutions. The weakening of local government in recent years has negatively affected this relationship. Similarly, central government has persistently promoted greater competitiveness between universities for the funding of research and teaching making co-operation between them more difficult, but this is also necessary to defend the common interests of the sector as a whole.

Thirdly, as has already been emphasised, the role of the law and the Courts was a major problem in the Harrington Affair. Since the mid-1980s there have

been both positive and negative developments. In 2002 the Commission for Racial Equality produced a Framework for a Race Equality Policy for Higher Education Institutions, and the Equality Act in 2010 subsequently made it unlawful to discriminate against students and staff on the basis of several protected characteristics, including race.⁷⁹ As in every sphere, institutional and structural racism persists in Higher Education, but some progress has undoubtedly been made over the past four decades.⁸⁰ Yet, it is equally evident that the recent legal clampdown on protest in general, and the OfS as a new instrument of national control over universities, may make direct action to challenge racism and other forms of discrimination still more hazardous than in the past.

Free speech is an integral part of Higher Education, but the limits of freedom of expression can never be absolute or fixed at any one time. Protest that is illegal in one era has always played a role in bringing about normative and legal change, and OfS decisions will no doubt be overturned by both the courts and direct action protests. Academic freedom will surely continue to be enlarged further as new forms of institutional discrimination and structural inequalities are uncovered and addressed. It is to be hoped that the Harrington Affair was one episode in a prolonged struggle to turn universities into inclusive communities for all, but it also holds some salutary warnings.

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The Rise and Fall and Rise of *World Marxist Review*

Reflections on the past and present journal

Helena Sheehan

When I saw an announcement for a new journal called '*World Marxist Review*' in 2024, this inevitably incited memories and reflections on the previous *World Marxist Review* (WMR). I thought about my own experiences of it within the context of the decades of historical turbulence, in which the journal and the international communist movement struggled to convey its position in a hostile world.

The origin

The journal, also known as *Problems of Peace and Socialism* (its title in Russian and some other languages), came into existence in 1958, as a result of a decision of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in 1957. It was conceived in continuity with previous Comintern and Cominform journals *The Communist International* (1919–1943) and *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy* (1947–1956). It was based in Prague and subsidised by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which appointed and supplied its chief editor until the last one, who was Czech. The majority of its staff of hundreds were also from the USSR. Its editorial board was constituted by representatives from sixty-nine communist parties, many of whom resided in Prague. In the beginning, it was published in eighteen languages: Russian, Czech, German, English, French, Hungarian, Polish, Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Mongolian, Japanese. At its peak, its print run reached 500,000 in forty-one languages in 145 countries. It also hosted conferences and published books.

While its pages conveyed a picture of a harmonious international communist movement with a correct line on all matters, behind the scenes it was a scenario of lively debate, long-running tensions and bitter splits. The emergence of the Sino-Soviet split eventuated in the departure of representatives from China, Korea and Albania and the cancellation of circulation in those countries and editions in those languages during 1962 and 1963. The Prague Spring of

1968 generated a sense of vibrant renewal for some and dangerous revisionism for others. The Warsaw Pact intervention crushing it was extremely controversial in the international communist movement. All communist parties were divided by it. Many of the more important communist parties outside the socialist countries expressed their opposition to the intervention. Those communists within the socialist countries who were against the intervention did not say so openly, but never recovered from their sense of a line being crossed. They discussed it in smaller trusted settings, but a curtain came over it in the public arena. At *WMR*, there was a missed issue, and its editor-in-chief, G. P. Frantov, who had become caught up in the Prague Spring, was replaced by K. Zaradov. I. T. Frolov became editor-in-chief in 1977. When the ideas of the Prague Spring re-emerged in the later 1980s, in the period of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, this time the journal went with the tide until that wave crashed.

As far as I know, there is no overall history of *World Marxist Review*. I hope someone will write one. The issues are archived.¹ There are other relevant archives, such as those of the CPSU and other communist parties, as well as those of intelligence services from the KGB to the CIA, and various other organizations. There are also accounts of it in overlapping histories and in various memoirs.² There are also some revealing diaries in archives.³ A good history would deal not only with the texts but contexts, not only with the immediate contexts of its production, distribution and reception, but the larger contexts of the history of the times, especially the history of the communist movement in these times. I have written about my own experience of it in my two books *Navigating the Zeitgeist* and *Until We Fall*.⁴ I'll give some indication of those experiences here, although they can be better understood within the larger narrative and analysis in those books.

Behind the scenes

I first came across *WMR* in the 1960s during my years of new left activism, but it was one among an array of many left journals, many of them seeming more relevant and vibrant. When I became a communist in the 1970s, I paid more attention to it, disappointed that I still found its articles rather uninteresting. When I found myself in Prague and learned what was going on behind the scenes, I discovered a ferment of ideas that was at odds with the journal's staid surface. The gap between what was said and what could be published was gigantic. It would have been so much better, so much more honest, so much more readable if it had bridged that gap.

I wondered who really read it or whether it was even written to be read. It seemed to be an ongoing declaration that there was an international communist

movement, and that there were certain positions that were agreed, even if there was no longer a Communist International in which all national parties were essentially sections of a single international party, with one line that could be enforced. Yet, although there was no longer a central authority in the international communist movement to enforce an orthodoxy, the CPSU still dominated, while other parties either complied or pushed against it. The journal reflected what was sometimes a difficult diplomatic balance. *WMR* clung to the lowest common denominator, while concealing all debates and disagreements that could be neither aired nor resolved within its pages. Meanwhile, these debates flared in the pages of journals of western communist parties, such as the Communist Party of Great Britain's *Marxism Today*.

In the mid-1970s, most communist parties in capitalist countries, especially in Europe, were in the throes of a debate about Eurocommunism. It represented a break with Soviet domination of the communist movement from those who were sympathetic to the ideas of the Prague Spring, who took a critical approach to the socialist countries, who stressed the importance of democracy under socialism, who thought that the idea of socialism had to evolve in new times and new conditions, who explored the possibilities of new alliances and who took seriously the rise of new social movements, such as feminism. This far I came to agree with it and came to be part of it. However, it encompassed a spectrum of positions. As time went on, some would take it in a direction that meant the unravelling of everything that made Marxism what it distinctively was. They began to scoff at concepts such as materialism, imperialism, mode of production, class struggle, etc. All that remained, once such crucial concepts had been rejected, was some kind of social democracy or even liberal pluralism. I became enmeshed in these debates, although I saw them play out far more vividly and vociferously in the CPGB than in the CPI (Communist Party of Ireland), my own party.

In 1978, I was in Moscow doing research for my book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A Critical History*.⁵ I was based at the International Lenin School, also known as the Institute of Social Sciences. I was researching Soviet debates on philosophy and science over the decades as well as current Soviet work in philosophy of science. I was also exploring Soviet society as best I could. I spoke freely and pushed every encounter as far as it could go in exploring the boundaries of discourse. Once I was speaking at the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences and I mentioned N. I. Bukharin, a great Marxist thinker unjustly accused and executed in the purges of the 1930s, whose name was still unmentionable. Most were glad that I did it, even if they could not yet do it themselves, not until *glasnost*!

While in Moscow, I was invited to speak at an international symposium on Dialectical Materialism and Modern Science in Prague in March 1978. The papers from it were to be published as a book in time for the World Congress of Philosophy in August of that year. This conference was sponsored by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and *World Marxist Review*. I was put on a flight from Moscow to Prague, where I was met at the airport and taken first to the offices of *WMR* and then to a chateau in Liblice, which had been turned into a conference centre. Most of the twenty-one speakers were the leading philosophers and scientists of the socialist countries. All were male, except for me. Also present were representatives of various communist parties on the editorial board of *WMR* and various staff of the journal. Most presentations were of a high standard and the discussion was highly intelligent. Although they were all older and eminent, they treated me with curiosity and respect, despite my youth and lack of eminence. My paper was punchy and polemical, going through various trends within Western Marxism in terms of their conceptualisation of science. It was enthusiastically received by the academics present.

Most of them were critical intellectuals, who were trying to get through a very difficult period for critical intellectuals. These were people whose work had come to my attention in my research and the opportunity to mix with them in this environment was fantastic. During the two days of formal proceedings, interspersed with meals and walks around the grounds and late-night drinking and talking, there was plenty of time for informal discussion. I formed strong bonds during these days, ones that would stretch far beyond this event. I responded most strongly (and vice versa) to Herbert Hörz of the Institute of Philosophy and Helmut Böhme of the Institute of Genetics, both of the GDR Academy of Sciences, Radovan Richta of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, József Lukács of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Theodor Oizerman of the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences. I would also have a lot to do with Ivan Frolov, the editor-in-chief of *WMR*, who was also a philosopher of science and participant in this symposium, although this was a more problematic association. Richta invited me to come back to Prague as guest of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and Hörz invited me to come to Berlin as guest of the GDR Academy of Sciences. I said yes to both, delighted with such invitations.

While in Liblice, there was also a chamber music concert one night and a banquet the last night. At this there were a number of less formal and much wittier speeches, especially after a certain amount of drink was taken. This more informal philosophising continued for a few days. We were taken to a chateau in Libechov to an art exhibition and then to the town of Melník, where there was a reception hosted by the regional party committee, who also briefed us on

the region, followed by a meeting with the mayor in the town hall. Then we were taken to a local wine cellar and let loose in it. There was much philosophising of the lighter sort with much robust laughter.

We then returned to Prague where we were booked into the International Hotel and taken around the city of Prague – so beautiful on the surface, so simmering with disaffection underneath. There was so much hidden from our view. Everyone knew in one way or another, but no one quite said. I was still thinking that perhaps it was necessary, that perhaps ‘socialism with a human face’ would still somehow be possible. In fact, the person responsible for that phrase had been none other than Radovan Richta, who was now in my company. I was quite intrigued by him. He had been a leading reformer during the Prague Spring and was now a leading normaliser in the purged era that followed. What was he thinking? How did he justify it? I wondered. There was a tortured ambiguity about him, a longing for something higher. Whatever he was, he was no thug. However, some were thugs, all through the society, including in academic and party circles. I came up against one of them here, and caught a glimpse of the ugly side of the Soviet presence in Prague.

At the editorial offices of *WMR*, I met with Vladimir Vyunitsky, who was the technical co-ordinator of the editorial work on the book which was to come out the conference, although Ivan Frolov was the formal editor. He told me that my paper would have to be edited for the book. I accepted that it had to cut in length, as did the papers of other participants, but he then proceeded to make unreasonable accusations and demands. He said I had made errors that would have to be corrected, that I was guilty of ideological distortion, that I had made incorrect assessments of several Marxist philosophers. Moreover, it was not my place to make any assessments of philosophers who had ever belonged to other communist parties. Only Hungarian comrades could evaluate György Lukács. Only French comrades could criticise Louis Althusser. Only Italian comrades could say anything about Lucio Colletti. This combination of ignorance and arrogance was stunning and absurd.

Boris Rubalsky, a Soviet interpreter, intervened and told me that the relationship between parties at the journal was very delicate and it had been agreed that no parties would criticise positions taken by others. I didn’t see why this should apply to philosophical discourse. Nevertheless, I compromised reluctantly and agreed to take out all references to Lukács (even though I was criticising the early Lukács as the later Lukács did himself), Korsch, Colletti and Althusser. I stayed up all night revising the text and cutting it in half. In between, I went out with other philosophers to *Laternica Magica*, but I was seething with anger and did not enjoy it. Other philosophers discussed my issues and agreed with my arguments. Hörz tried to reason with Vyunitsky. Richta said that he

would submit my full unexpurgated text to the leading philosophical journal in Czechoslovakia. Soviet philosophers later asked me for the text for *Voprosy filosofii*, the leading philosophical journal of the USSR. I returned to Moscow believing that this had been sorted, however unsatisfactorily, but it turned out that it was far from the end of it.

A month later I received a copy of the text of my chapter in Russian for me to approve. I went over the text with Valery Terin, a philosopher at my institute. The text was utterly alien to me. It bore little resemblance to either the original or revised text. It was riddled with logical contradictions, historical inaccuracies, tedious cliché and convoluted jargon. Valery agreed with me that the text was irredeemable and that I should refuse consent. I wrote immediately to Frolov refusing consent for publication of that text. To be co-operative, I wrote yet another text. The institute was very helpful, providing translation and typing services and the speediest channels to communicate with Frolov. He replied a few weeks later saying that it was too late to do much about the Russian edition. He admitted that the editorial work was problematic and that my views had been distorted by it. He said that he hoped that editorial errors could be corrected and that something of my 'characteristic style' could be restored in other languages. He said that it was good that the full text would be published in philosophical journals in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. I was unhappy with this, but too busy in my last period in Moscow to do much more about it then. The saga would go on for more than a year and have consequences that I did not foresee at this time.

On May Day, I met Betty Sinclair after the parade in Red Square and spent the late afternoon and evening with her. She had recently retired as secretary of the Belfast Congress of Trade Unions and gone to Prague to represent the CPI on the *WMR* editorial board. We went up to Lenin Hills, where there was a panoramic view of the city, to see the fireworks and then to the party hotel for drink and talk. We got on well on the day, as she had not yet comprehended my offence, although I had informed her, as my party's representative at *WMR*, of my problems with Vyunitsky. Betty had mixed feelings about intellectuals. Mostly she was inclined to proletarian anti-intellectualism, but had to deal with the fact that the Soviet Union took intellectuals seriously. She told me on this day that she was proud that our party could produce someone who could hold her own with them. She changed her mind about that as my dispute with *WMR* persisted. During this time, I became very interested in the International Lenin School during the Comintern period. I knew it had been affected by the purges and I asked Betty about that, as she had been there during that period. She was not very forthcoming. As the night went on, the discussion was more and more inebriated and full of uncritical praise of the great USSR. All questions were

smothered in proclamations of victory and loyalty and denunciations of treachery.

At *WMR* in Prague, with the Eurocommunism debate in full swing and the aftermath of 1968 still seething, she did not engage meaningfully with any of the issues, but only made dismissive remarks about 'the boyos of Eurocommunism' and 'poor old silly Dubček'. She mocked the CPGB's programme, the *British Road to Socialism*, as 'the British road to nowhere'. In her diaries, there are many angry comments and negative assessments of comrades, including myself. I was stunned to behold the term 'Sheehanism' for intellectuals who dared to question the party and diverted attention from urgent political tasks to questions of philosophy. When the party decided to recall her, I volunteered to replace her at *WMR*, thinking that I might play a positive role in bringing it out of its malaise. Of course, there was no chance whatsoever of either being sent or being allowed to function effectively if sent. Betty insisted that I would be the last person who would be welcome there and she was right, at least as far as those who held sway were concerned. They decided to send Tommy O'Flaherty, a young unemployed graduate, who was affable and considered reliable.

At the World Congress of Philosophy in Düsseldorf in August 1978, the West Germans hosting it created a nasty cold war atmosphere from the start. At an opening plenary, one speaker provocatively referred to Marx as 'too smart a German to be left to the Marxists'. At most sessions, Marxists, phenomenologists and neo-positivists of many varieties all read papers past each other. Some of the Soviet philosophers found it difficult to address arguments coming from other philosophical traditions, but then so did most analytical philosophers. At one session, there was a head-on attack on 'diamat', where Soviet philosophers sat there stunned, while I leapt up to defend, which left the attacker stunned, as he was expecting a response from an old Soviet male and not from a young Irish female. Another confrontation I had was with a Soviet male, harking back to my time at *WMR*. The book *Dialectical Materialism and Natural Science* was launched and distributed at the congress and the chapter with my name on it was utterly alien to me. It was the text for which I had explicitly refused consent. When I saw Ivan Frolov, I breathed fire and a crowd of other Soviet philosophers gathered, astonished that I would speak to someone so eminent in that way. Once again, he admitted that I was right, but washed his hands of the actual editorial work, although he was formally the editor. Later he became a close confidant of Gorbachev and editor of *Pravda*. I found it ironic, when he later emerged as a prominent exponent of *glasnost*, to remember the lack of *glasnost* he had inflicted upon me.

On International Women's Day in 1979, I was called in by CPI General Secretary Michael O'Riordan to be reprimanded for the way I had dealt with *WMR*.

After the publication of that chapter under my name in *Dialectical Materialism and Modern Science*, I had written a letter of protest to the *WMR* editorial board in Prague. I had also spoken about it to Gordon McLennan, General Secretary of the CPGB, who insisted that I speak to Bert Ramelson, the CPGB representative on the *WMR* editorial board, when I was in London. I was often in Britain, because the intellectual life of the CPGB was much richer than that of the CPI. Both McLennan and Ramelson agreed that this way of doing things at *WMR* had to stop, as did the whole production of jargon-ridden material that no one wanted to read. O'Riordan was outraged that I had spoken to them about it. Moreover, a response to my protest had come from Prague to the party. It was a transcript of an interview that Tommy O'Flaherty had with Vladimir Vyunitsky to inform the CPI of the *WMR* response to my protest. It was full of overt lies, covert distortion and heresy-hunting accusations of errors. Mick didn't want to hear my side of the story at all. For him, if a Soviet person and an Irish person disagreed about something, the Soviet person was right. He was untroubled when the original article, which a Soviet person now said was full of ideological errors, was published in *Irish Socialist Review*. He was not interested in the substantive issues. He referred the matter to the national executive with the recommendation that I be reprimanded for protesting to Prague and for talking to Ramelson. This was hotly debated. As a compromise with those who felt I had a case, the party also decided to inform *WMR* that they regretted the publication of the chapter, which distorted my views and 'inadequately represented the philosophical level of our party'.

Tommy O'Flaherty turned out not to be as compliant as the party had intended. He hit the ground running, because he had to deal with my situation and he believed they had a case to answer. Unlike Betty, he paid attention to the debates that were going on at *WMR*, even if they weren't reflected in its pages. There were social occasions where there were vigorous debates, focused around all the issues raised by Eurocommunism, where Bert Ramelson of the CPGB clashed with John Pittman of the CPUSA. They were on friendly terms, but held conflicting positions. Tommy was increasingly convinced by Bert Ramelson's arguments. Ramelson was a big bear of a man and a robust debater. His position was broadly 'left Eurocommunist', in that he still held to the centrality of class analysis, but took a critical view of 'actually existing socialism' on matters of socialist democracy. Tommy also began to learn Czech and to speak to Czechs, who spoke honestly about their lives, which cast an unflattering light on the party line. He later told me that, because he had been a young hardliner, he realised that in another time and place he could have been a mass murderer. After he was withdrawn, he became less active in politics and regarded himself as someone who should leave a light imprint on the world. Essop Pahad, SACP

representative and another well-known hard-liner who was part of these discussions, later became a government minister in South Africa and a defender of the neo-liberal turn taken by the ANC under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki (also once a leading SACP member).

The last days

In 1990, I returned to Prague after time Berlin and Budapest, where I was watching the world turn upside down. It was a strange interregnum. At the airport, I was taken aside and interrogated. I was asked the purpose of my visit. There were various answers I could have given, all true, which would play differently depending on whether I was dealing with the old or new order. Thinking it was the old order, I said that I was visiting *World Marxist Review*. My interrogator made various phone calls, then walked me through customs and baggage reclaim, hailed a taxi and instructed the driver to take me directly to *WMR*. I had no idea why I was singled out, because Prague was swarming with all sorts of people whom the old order would not have allowed in Prague. I had arranged to stay at *WMR*, which I found to be a very different place from my interval there in 1978. I had a lot to think about as I walked down the long corridors of this building, which was once a Catholic seminary and soon to be one again. The Czechoslovak government had ordered the journal to leave. International members of the editorial board were packing up and booking flights home, although some were members of illegal parties and had nowhere to go. Some assets were up for sale locally, while others were being shipped back to the USSR. The Catholic Church would soon take possession of the building.

There was a flurry of activity as a last issue was being produced before closing down. Under *glasnost*, *WMR* had transformed itself almost beyond recognition. Every issue brought new surprises, especially to those acquainted with it for many years. For years every issue was full of formulaic pronouncements on peace, disarmament, and proletarian internationalism, full of bitter denunciations of bourgeois ideology and socialist revisionism. Anything written with life in it was drained and distorted into an empty and unattractive shell. I was not the only author to object, although others were more resigned to their mutilation than I had been. However, when it changed, it did so for real. There was real debate, openly aired. The letters pages not only praised articles, but took issue with them. The unmentionable names became mentionable. There were honest articles on Trotsky and Bukharin. It opened its pages not only to critical communists, but to non-communists criticising communists. There were articles not only by Alexander Dubček and Milovan Djilas, but by John Kenneth Galbraith, Andrei Sakharov, even Zbigniew Brzezinski. There were articles articulating

positions against which the journal had published fierce denunciations. There was a particular attraction to articles arguing for convergence of communism and social democracy and even convergence of capitalism and socialism. This reflected the transition of many hitherto communists into social democrats and liberals, even some conservatives. There was freedom for honest Marxists to express themselves as they always wanted but also for those who did not want to pretend to be Marxists anymore or had lost their confidence in Marxism once it fell from power.

Everything was opening up just as it was closing down. When the announcement of its closure came in March 1990, I had written an article about it in the *Irish Times*. The sub-editor had entitled it 'Marxist journal reforms too late', which was fair enough. I was sad to see it ending just as it was starting to be interesting. Being there as it was being dismantled made me see vividly how the communist movement was coming apart and also how weak were some of the bonds that held it together. My conversations with Stanislav Shchegolsky were jolting and memorable. I had known him in Moscow a decade earlier. He was a Soviet interpreter who had accompanied me in my research visits to the Academy of Sciences and Lenin Library in Moscow. He seemed harder now. He spoke more freely now. He was very critical of the *modus operandi* of the journal and the role played by representatives of the various communist parties there. They were paid a lot of money for very little work, availed of the best of health care, including luxury spa treatments, and did not want to know how the mass of people in socialist countries actually lived. He did not think the CPI had distinguished itself there. He had much to say about life in both Prague and Moscow, where he was soon returning. He said that his parents were finding it all hard to comprehend.

V. L. Shelepin, a Soviet editor of the journal, told me that he thought that class struggle was a bad thing. He wanted economic efficiency, social justice, consensus, solidarity, democracy. He was keen on Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia and the pluralism of positions within it. I also spent much time in Prague visiting the offices of Civic Forum and the other political parties springing up and speaking to people with many contrasting points of view, including the philosopher Karel Kosík, once a leading Marxist, who now believed that the starting point for critical analysis of our times was the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the task was liberation of subject from object.

While at *WMR*, I also met Lubomír Mlynář of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, who was exploring the possibility of a successor project to the journal. There were proposals for an international broad left publication. As to his party, it had lost its leading role, much of its property and many of its members. His attitude was that one historical period of socialism had ended and now

another one must begin. As I left, Shelepin said to me ‘If we meet again at the beginning of the next century, we won’t be talking about communist parties and social democratic parties. We need new ideas and new organisational forms.’ I reflected on these words and thought of the words of Marx and Engels ‘All that is solid melts into air’. However, I further reflected, air still exists and we breathe it all the time.

So many times in these months I heard talk of ‘starting again at zero’, of scrapping forty-fifty-seventy years of history and starting over. There would be no starting over and certainly not from zero. This vast experiment in human history failed to fulfil the hopes it engendered and the edifice it constructed was collapsing, but I felt that it had cut too deeply into the psyche, into the rhythms of history, to disappear without trace. The communist movement was the great movement of the twentieth century. Whatever way this legacy would play out, it would be in a drastically transformed environment. I believed that the turn to the right in Eastern Europe would paradoxically bring the greatest need for the left that this part of the world had ever known. After the euphoria would come the exploitation and eventually the discovery that freedom was not so simple nor so accessible as it seemed.

Many years have passed now. We saw the USSR, GDR, ČSSR and Yugoslavia disappear from the maps of the world. People who had lived under socialism, however imperfect it was, were subjected to a particularly brutal form of capitalism. Even if it is sometimes seductive, capitalism is still brutal. It is ever changing and even more brutal in ever new ways all the time. Meanwhile, China has been on the rise, and many Marxists now see the Communist Party of China as the standard bearer of world socialism, even though the CPC will never have the same relationship to other communist parties as the CPSU once had.

A reincarnation?

In 2024, a new publication called *World Marxist Review* was announced. Its founding statement, defined it:

The World Marxist Review (WMR) is a new-founded quarterly, peer-reviewed, open access title, co-sponsored by the Innovative Marxist Studies Branch of the World Association for Political Economy and the Northwestern Polytechnical University in China, published by Canut Press. In the spirit of upholding fundamental principles and breaking new grounds, the *World Marxist Review* aims to solve major theoretical and countermeasure problems in the fields of global economy, people’s livelihood, politics, culture, civilization, ecology, military, international relations, and social movements, thus

objectively analyze erroneous views in various fields, especially criticize the fallacies and acts of neo-imperialist and hegemonic alliances in the current conjuncture, so as to promote the consistency and innovation of Marxist theories around the world. The *World Marxist Review* mainly publishes articles on a wide range of important topics, including: studies on the classical works of Marxism and their development by Marxists in various countries, the latest advances and scientific innovations in Marxist theory in various countries, the major theories of the current communist and workers' parties in various countries, the international communist movement and the development of world socialism, etc.⁶

Although it is not formally linked to the CPC or the 'international communist movement', it is very much within that orbit. Its international editorial board are Marxist authors who are positively disposed toward China, but not necessarily members of communist parties. Its editors-in-chief are Cheng Enfu and Gabriel Rockhill. While it generally reflects the party line of the CPC and sometimes reiterates certain party-line formulas in a style somewhat reminiscent of the CPSU and the old *WMR*, it is by no means reducible to that.

The CPC has devoted much study to the rise and fall of the USSR and learned much from that, because it is determined not to go down in history in the same way as the USSR. While Chinese publications and conferences can sometimes remind me of Soviet ones in stale iterations of Marxism as the orthodoxy of a one-party state, the intellectual life of China is far freer than that of pre-glasnost USSR. There is real debate in Chinese Marxism, as well as a real freedom to hold positions other than Marxism. The reform and opening up that began under Deng Xiaoping brought capitalism not only into economic production but into knowledge production as well. Many Chinese academics do work that is no different from the rest of global academe. In the current 'new era' under Xi Jinping, there is a revival of Marxism, both from above and from below.⁷ The School of Marxism at Peking University, where I have taught for the past two years, is one of many such centres throughout China. Young people on social media produce lively memes highlighting the difference between capitalism and socialism.

In this period where capitalism is decadent yet still dominant, the new *World Marxist Review* could play a role in analysing the forces in motion and galvanising a movement that honours communist traditions while finding a new way forward for them in our own time. To do so, it would do well to take a critical look at its past incarnation as well as the challenges posed by turbulent times facing us now.

Notes

- 1 See https://archive.org/details/pub_world-marxist-review
- 2 See, for example, Richard Staar, *Foreign Policies of the Soviet Union*, Stanford CA, 1991; Zdeněk Mlynář, *Night Frost in Prague*, New York 1980.
- 3 Particularly revealing are the diaries of Anatoly Chernyaev, who worked at WMR in its first years, then spent many years in the International Department of the CPSU and later became foreign policy advisor in Gorbachev. These diaries are deposited at the national Security Archive in the US and are accessible at <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/anatoly-chernyaev-diary>. The diaries of Betty Sinclair, who was Secretary of Belfast Council of Trade unions and then CPI representative on WMR, are deposited in Dublin City Library.
- 4 Helena Sheehan, *Navigating the Zeitgeist*, New York 2017, and *Until We Fall*, New York 2023.
- 5 Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A Critical History* (3 editions), London 1985, 1993, 2017.
- 6 See <https://worldmarxistreview.org/index.php/wmr/about>.
- 7 Helena Sheehan 'Exploring the Chinese revolution today' *Monthly Review* 77 (6) November 2025, pp. 41-53. <https://monthlyreview.org/articles/exploring-the-chinese-revolution-today/>

Peasant War, Violence and Revolution

Jakub Beneš

in conversation with Samuel Foster and Francis King

Jakub S. Beneš is the author of *The Last Peasant War: Violence and Revolution in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (2025), a history of the largely forgotten peasant revolution that swept Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War. This is an edited transcript of a discussion with Samuel Foster and Francis King held in October 2025.

FK: The upheavals in Eastern Europe after the end of the First World War are often considered through the lens of national liberation or of social revolution. But in your book you look at them in terms of ‘peasant war’. What would you say are the main insights that we can gain from taking this perspective?

JB: I would say it is about recovering the experience of the largest demographic group at this time in much of Europe from what E. P. Thompson referred to as the enormous condescension of posterity. Peasants mostly didn’t understand the upheavals of 1917 to 1921 through the lens of socialist revolution or national liberation. They had their own perspective on these events and on their own involvement in them, which I thought needed to be recovered. The more I looked at what was happening in the countryside at this time, through oblique or suggestive references in isolated studies and archival sources, the more I realised there had been something quite big happening that hadn’t really been talked about enough. It had been studied in the Russian case, although there’s still more work to be done. But regarding East-Central Europe, there was not much about what peasants had been doing, what they experienced. So I was inspired to look more closely, and I think what was happening can be described as a social, though not a socialist, revolution. For the peasants, who made up most of the people in East-Central and Eastern Europe, this revolution was about agricultural land, and they had very egalitarian ideas about how land should be redistributed and shared. But these were not *per se* socialist ideas. The peasants were not interested in collective ownership, although they were interested in cooperative arrangements for sharing and pooling of technology and resources for certain things like production, marketing and so on. So cooperativism was already in the air in the countryside, but collective ownership was always something that they that peasants regarded with deep suspicion. So the first thing is to recover the experience of this enormous group of people.

Another thing I think this peasant-war concept can help us understand is how the mobilisation of the peasantry influenced other developments, such as

the kind of political centralism in some of the European 'successor states', like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, which ended up undermining them at the end of the interwar period. Peasant violence was also one of the reasons why the Entente imposed obligations on the successor states in East Central Europe to protect their minorities, which in some respects alienated these states early on from their western sponsors. I'm thinking particularly of the 'minority treaty' imposed on Poland – although the episodes of violence by soldiers against Jews were the most notorious, violence by peasants also certainly played a part.

Finally, 'peasant war' can help us understand that revolution can be something that people with mostly conservative instincts may pursue to defend their way of life. That's not an original idea – Eric Wolf made the same point in his *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, first published in 1969. It is easy to call these peasant actors naive and unrealistic, but I don't think that's right. If you look at the agrarian politics that emerges at the end of the First World War, these peasant mobilisations are not simply about turning back the clock. Although they might occasionally invoke lost privileges like peasant revolts often did in the medieval and early modern period, there is also a blueprint for something new.

SF: Thanks Jakub. As you say, much has been written on the role of the peasantry as a revolutionary actor in Imperial Russia before 1914, for example in the 1905 revolution. But what about the Habsburg monarchy under Franz Josef? Did the conditions of the peasants in pre-war Austria-Hungary provide a similar basis for unrest, or were these rural uprisings mainly just another manifestation of the collapse of the Imperial state after the war?

JB: I think it's a bit of both. There were certainly deep grievances among the peasantry before the First World War. But what happened at the end of the war was quite specific, a product of the mobilisation of vast peasant masses into a large multi-ethnic conscript army that was then deployed at faraway fronts. At the end of the war, when they were either demobilised or had deserted, the peasants brought back with them the experience of the fronts, of using weapons and functioning as an army. So there was a level of militarism and violence in the peasant movements at the end of the First World War that had not been seen before. Even the great 1907 peasant revolt in Romania, where some peasant army veterans played a prominent role, was nowhere near as militarised as what happened at the end of the First World War.

That said, there were also longer-term, post-emancipation, grievances that made peasants predisposed to revolt after the war – loss of stability, exposure to the caprices of the capitalist market, indebtedness, things like that. The position in East-Central Europe was a bit different from that in Russia, in that in Russia communal forms of land ownership had continued, whereas since 1848 in East Central Europe land ownership had taken liberal, individualistic forms. But there were major grievances with that post-emancipation situation.

In the Habsburg monarchy, especially in the so-called Austrian half, there had been an incremental democratisation which meant that even the poorest peasants got to vote for the first time in 1897, and on equal terms from 1907. So peasants had already been brought into the political system. Peasant parties and organisations existed before the war, but emerged much bigger, stronger, and more motivated after it.

FK: Could you please say some more about how the experience of the war helped develop a peasant class consciousness, moving the peasantry from being a class in itself to be a class for itself, one with a sense of its own class interests?

JB: Yes, that the peasants became a class for themselves is good way of putting it, and it is one of the arguments of my book. Peasant class consciousness waxed and waned over the centuries, but during the First World War it crystallised in a really powerful way. A key factor was the peasants' growing sense of opposition between themselves and these dynastic empires, which for generations they had looked upon as 'their own' in some way. You know, the old truism that the peasants imagined that the good king or emperor was on their side, and it was just the local officials or the nobility who spoiled things. But this fondness for the dynasty and its state was eroded over the course of the war. I argue that a big factor in that erosion was the state's intrusion into the rural economy to extract agricultural products by force, in order to feed the armies, to feed the cities. Peasants increasingly felt victimised by the state, and began to see themselves as a category separate from the state, the dynasty, and the Emperor. The cities also began to appear as a rival or even as an enemy, even though many peasants had relatives, friends or seasonal jobs in cities.

FK: So during the war the state and the city came to be perceived as the main exploiters of the peasantry, whereas previously the main direct exploiters had been the large landowners, the rural rich?

JB: I think that's right. Of course, there were all sorts of local variations. Some peasants got rich during the war because they were well connected to urban markets and were able to sell at a good profit. But I found that most of the peasant smallholders were not in that position, and felt they were being exploited, really robbed by a government which was only interested in feeding the cities. Of course, this was an industrial war, and the cities were the sites of industry, especially the munitions industry. Munitions workers did see their wages and rations increase during the war, although other workers did not.

SF: A central focus of your book is on the 'green cadres', the peasant paramilitary groups consisting largely of war veterans, which emerged towards the end of the war. Although, as you show, they were disparate and localised, should we also see them as indicative of wider international trends, particularly from 1917

onwards? How significant, for instance, were the veterans who had served on the Eastern Front, or had even been POWs during the Russian Revolution?

JB: Very significant, I think. The green cadres caught my interest early on, and the more I looked, the more interesting and intriguing they became. They played quite an important part in the breakdown of imperial authority in East Central Europe, and I kept finding them and veterans of this loose movement in all sorts of places from 1918 all the way through the Second World War. The experience of having been mobilised into these multi-national, multi-ethnic armies and sent to fight in far-flung places fostered a sense of shared fate among the peasant conscripts. It can certainly help explain why they all called themselves 'green cadres' in all these disparate localities. They all shared the same dissatisfaction with the army, which in the Austro-Hungarian case was severely under-provisioned by 1917. And as for those soldiers who had been POWs in Russia, many of them had witnessed the February and October revolutions firsthand and had often liked what they saw. Then they started coming back home, a trickle at first, becoming a deluge in the first half of 1918. And they did not like what they saw back home, and thought that things in Russia had been going pretty well during the revolution. And they brought a kind of radicalism back with them.

As for international trends, we might surmise that their colour-coding, 'green cadres', was partly inspired by the example of the 'Red Guards', these local Bolshevik militias, they had seen in Russia. But significantly they had their own colour, which reflects their separate identity and agenda. There were also international patterns of communication and transportation at this time – everything travelled along railways, which served both as vectors of information and of revolution. The movement developed and spread along railway routes and, like in the Russian Civil War, the green cadres and other armies fought for control of them.

So we see green cadres appearing in Austria-Hungary from early 1918, and then especially by 1919 we see big armies of peasant deserters in the Russian Civil War, who also get dubbed 'green armies', particularly by outsiders. But the returning POWs were more important as a factor in Austria-Hungary than in the Russian Revolution.

FK: What was the role of intellectuals in the leadership of the peasant movement in the former Habsburg Empire? In Russia, the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries was very much created and dominated by the intelligentsia, both nationally and locally, although in so far as they articulated peasant demands, they could gain peasant support. Was the position in Austria Hungary similar, or did their organisations come more directly from below, from the class itself?

JB: Well, when the countryside collapses into anarchy or becomes anarchic during the imperial collapse, it's difficult to discern the role of any intellectuals. This

was probably the case in Russia as well for much of 1917. I'm not sure whether many SR party functionaries were involved in, say, occupying estate land or looting manor houses. But yes, peasantist parties in East-Central Europe do quickly become an important presence on the ground in the new successor states, and in some places that certainly overlaps with the revolutionary period. In other places the peasant parties only assert or reassert their authority once things have settled down and the state again has regained its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence over most of its territory.

However, in Croatia, for example, there was definitely an overlap between the organisation of Stjepan Radić's Croatian Peasant Party on the ground and peasant radicalism, some of it violent. In September 1920 there was this revolt against livestock branding in central Croatia. Although Radić himself was in jail at that time and was preaching non-violence, many of the revolt's leaders were local Peasant Party functionaries. They could be considered local 'organic intellectuals', in the Gramscian sense.

FK: In your book you mention how the Czech nationalists tried to harness the peasant movement to their own national aspirations, not entirely successfully. Later on, you discuss how some peasant movements were co-opted by or evolved towards communist, fascist and various other currents. What can we say about the ways other political movements in East-Central Europe tried to ally with, use, or fight these peasant movements?

JB: Well, in the era of nationalism, the peasantry are gold, right? They're the paragon of national virtue, the truest embodiment of 'the nation', at least from the perspective of nationalist intellectuals. Some of them, in the more literate areas like the Czech lands, realised this and tried to exploit it for their own ends. In the 'Slovácko Brigade', which I discuss in chapter five, the peasantry in that area [south-east Moravia] already had a sense of 'the nation' and recognised its value. But they had their own eccentric and heterodox understanding of what the nation is. They wanted it to be decentralised, ruralised and kind of folklorised in a more genuine sense than the urban intellectuals and leaders in Prague were ready for.

So there was contest over the concept of the nation. Some of the peasant leaders, like Radić, played up the peasantry's national value, but then made very specific peasantist claims about what the peasants really wanted. On the other hand, everyone wanted to claim the peasants for their side, even if they didn't really want to do much for them, because the peasants were valuable symbolically and demographically. The peasantist parties wagered heavily on parliamentary politics and the stability of parliaments. So when there was a series of authoritarian coups across the region [later in the 1920s], the peasantist politicians did not have much of a response.

The peasants themselves were free agents politically. In some notable cases they were co-opted into movements of the extreme right. In some other regions,

there was a lot of interest among the peasants in communism and far left politics, although that tended to remain regionalised and limited to ethnic and national minorities.

The extreme right definitely sought to play up its attachment to the peasantry, and in some places they even adopted a peasantist programme, which contributed to their rising stock. There was a notable example in Hungary in the 1930s, the so-called Scythe Cross movement, which drew heavily on peasant radicals in the southeast of the country. But the biggest case was the 'Iron Guard' in Romania, which cultivated and got genuine mass peasant support. This was down to the local activism of young Iron Guard members in villages across Romania. They cultivated an image of latter-day Mendicant Friars, modest, ascetic, going among the people and helping them. In many places the peasants really took to them, and the Iron Guard was getting hundreds of thousands of votes in the late 1930s. And in Romania, at least while its founder and leader Corneliu Codreanu was alive, the Iron Guard did not need to make any concessions to the large landowner class. But in most cases far right and fascist movements just paid lip service to the peasantry, which did not generally win them lasting peasant support. The classic case here is Italy. Mussolini would talk about a sort of a rural nation of peasants, letting the fresh air of the countryside into the cities and all this, but at the end of the day he allied with the large landowners again.

By the 1930s most of the regimes in East-Central Europe were one flavour of authoritarian nationalism or another. And the peasants were absolutely critical for the nationalist imagination, at least symbolically. But this did not mean much in terms of actual results for the peasants. In economic policy these regimes were privileging industry and the cities. They were led mostly by urban lawyers, the core of their movements was white collar workers, and they saw urban modernity as a matter of national prestige and power too. And industry was key to maintaining the army and defence and things like that which peasantists were not that keen on. They thought industry and the government should be investing food processing plants, and things which would make it easier for peasants to market their stuff and provide some jobs.

SF: What can we say about the legacy of this peasantist movement today? Did anything even remain after the Cold War?

JB: I think that anti-urban populism can be seen as one legacy of these movements, and it's obviously very important in today's world. Of course, the peasant movements of the first half of the 20th century are not the only source for this, but they certainly are one source. Even in their more moderate forms, they always argued for the moral superiority of the countryside and the moral inferiority of the city which was inherently corrupt, exploitative, and sometimes dangerously foreign in terms of its ethnic makeup. Some of these tropes are very strong today in various kinds of populist movements. They draw their support

not just from the countryside, which is demographically negligible compared to what it was, but from provincial towns, down-at-heel post-industrial cities and anywhere that feels like it's outside of the Big City, the metropolis, the thriving hubs of global capitalism. But it's important to recognise, of course, that the peasantry as it existed back then is gone in Europe and the West today. The peasantry that still exists is in the global South.

FK: So if we were to draw up a balance sheet of peasantism, what would you say were its lasting achievements, in those parts of Europe where these movements were once strong?

JB: The three pillars of peasantism, the three core tenets, which have been identified in the work of Alex Toshkov, for example, and others, were: belief in some kind of representative democracy; belief in and work towards a kind of a co-operative economy; and the central idea of land reform, that the land should belong to those who work it. These principles changed the countryside and maybe by extension modern Europe for the better. I think these are still admirable goals and are still highly valued in Europe. It's certainly not the case that that everyone who votes for anti-urban populist parties wants some kind of fascism, or a return to the manorial economy or something like that. There is still democratic and hopeful political potential in the countryside that remains to be tapped.

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Review article

What was Bolshevism?

John Biggart

Lars T. Lih, *What was Bolshevism?*, Brill: Leiden, 2023; Haymarket Books: Chicago IL, 2024; 582 pp.; ISBN 9789004684454, £134.00, hbk; ISBN 9798888903292, £50.00, pbk.

In this volume Lars T. Lih has gathered together sixteen scholarly articles published between 1986 and 2016 and added three chapters of unpublished material (on Aleksandr Tsiurupa, Nikolai Bukharin, and 'Masks and lies in Stalin's Russia'). Lih's studies take in aspects of the politics, economics and culture of Soviet Russia (including theatre, music and poetry). His approach involves a close reading of the texts of well-known Communist leaders. Russianists and Sovietologists in a variety of disciplines will find much that is challenging in his book.

Lih's analytical starting point is a distinction between the 'external' ideology of the Soviet régime (as disseminated to the population), and the 'internal' ideology of its leaders (their world-view or self-image). But should 'Bolshevism' be reduced to these two intellectual frameworks? Certainly, when the party in power branded itself the 'Russian Communist Party' in 1918, it made sure to claim the designation 'Bolshevik' – RKP(b) – but to understand this term fully, we need to explore what it meant before 1918. Lih does not provide this back story in his volume.

The history of 'Bolshevism' is anything but straightforward. The famous 'split' at the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) in 1903, which gave rise to a 'Bolshevik' faction around Lenin and his supporters, and an opposing 'Menshevik' faction, was only the beginning. By the end of 1911 there were already three tendencies within the RSDRP which considered themselves to be 'Bolshevik': the 'Left-Bolsheviks' of the 'Forward' group, the 'Party Bolsheviks' or 'Conciliators', and Lenin's own group of supporters. A key objective of Lenin's group was to reconstruct the RSDRP on a much narrower basis, excluding the 'Forward' group and the 'Conciliators' together with the Mensheviks of the Paris-based paper *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*, and the group around Leon Trotsky, based in Vienna. Consequently, two rival 'RSDRP' conferences were convened in 1912: one by the Leninists in Prague in January; and another by an assortment of groups of the RSDRP in Vienna in August. The outbreak of war in 1914 led to further fragmentation. By the eve of the revolution of February 1917, although the Leninists still upheld the legitimacy of the 'Central Committee'

formed at their Prague conference, the RSDRP as a coherent political entity had ceased to exist.

During 1917, efforts were made to unite social democrats around a platform of 'internationalism' – opposition to the policy of Russia's post-February Provisional Government of remaining loyal to the Entente and sustaining the war effort. One outcome of this was a 'Congress of RSDRP Internationalists' held in July–August 1917. Convened jointly by the Petrograd Inter-District Group of United Social Democrats (a.k.a. 'Mezhraionka') and Lenin's organisation,¹ this congress resolved to unite on the basis of a 'narrow coalition' of internationalists.² In official histories, this congress was later designated the Sixth Congress of the RSDRP(b). In the Central Committee elected by this congress, alongside the Leninists we find such disparate elements as the independent Aleksandra Kollontai (a former Menshevik), Aleksei Rykov and Nikolai Krestinsky (former 'Conciliators'), Moisey Uritsky (a 'Party-Menshevik' and member of the 'August Bloc'), and Leon Trotsky and Adolf Joffe of the editorial board of *Pravda* (Vienna).³ Later in August 1917 the Menshevik factions within the RSDRP held their own 'unification' congress, an event that effectively completed the long drawn-out process of dividing the former RSDRP into two completely separate organisations at all levels.

By the time the newly-created party of internationalists held its next congress – on 6–8 March 1918 – it was already the ruling party. The decisions of this congress signalled a more radical break with the political traditions of the RSDRP, with regard both to the state structure of a post-revolutionary Russia, and to the means of determining that structure. The RSDRP programme, adopted in 1903 and accepted by all its factions, had called for 'popular self-government, that is, the concentration of all higher state authority in a single chamber legislative assembly' and for 'universal, equal and direct suffrage in elections both to the legislative assembly and to all local authorities'.⁴ During the revolution of 1905, the immediate goal of a 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' had not been questioned within the party.⁵ Leaflets issued by the St. Petersburg Committee at that time had frequently called for a 'Constituent Assembly', an aspiration widely shared across the Russian revolutionary movement.⁶ The next year, in April–May 1906, the Bolshevik section's motions to the RSDRP's so-called 'Unification' congress declared that the task of the party and proletariat was to secure a genuine 'democratic revolution'.⁷ The London congress of May–June 1907, at which the Bolsheviks had a majority, denounced the inadequacy of the State Duma (a largely ineffectual representative body conceded by the Tsar in October 1905) and called for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly 'on the basis of universal, equal, direct and equal suffrage'.⁸ 'A democratic republic' and 'universal suffrage' also featured in the resolution on 'Elections to the Fourth State Duma' adopted by Lenin's conference in Prague in January 1912.⁹

However, by the time of the congress of 6–8 March 1918, a very different policy had been implemented – the creation of a 'commune state', as outlined in

Lenin's 'April Theses' of 1917 and implicitly endorsed by the congress of July-August 1917.¹⁰ Although a Constituent Assembly had been elected in November 1917, it had refused by a majority to ratify a declaration by the Central Executive Committee of Soviets proclaiming a Republic of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, and so, after just one session in January 1918, it had been closed down.¹¹

This congress set up a commission to review the party's programme,¹² and during the evening session of 8 March Lenin proposed that the title 'Russian Communist Party' should be adopted. However, in order to demonstrate both a break with the past and an umbilical link with the pre-revolutionary RSDRP, he also proposed that the designation 'Bolsheviks' should be added in brackets.¹³ In this way, the new party became the RKP(b). In 1938, the tag 'Bolsheviks' was preserved in the title of Stalin's 'Short Course' history of the CPSU;¹⁴ it was not dropped from the party's official title until the 'Nineteenth' Party Congress of October 1952. With the same purpose of constructing a party history that was continuous with that of the RSDRP (in fact a teleological connection), party historians numbered all congresses and conferences of the RSDRP before and after 1917 as an uninterrupted series. Consequently, the London congress of 1907 (the last before the revolutions of 1917) became the 'Fifth Congress', and the congress of July-August 1917 became the 'Sixth'.

The purpose of this historical excursion is to question Lih's contention that the Soviet-era 'Bolsheviks' were the 'heirs to pre-war revolutionary Social Democracy'. (p.433) To make this claim is to disregard not only the content of the programmes of the RSDRP, but also the outlook of many tendencies within the party before the war, Bolsheviks included. Perhaps the book would have been better titled 'What was Soviet Communism?'

Lih's approach to the 'internal ideology' of the new rulers is also problematic. Examining a hardly representative sample of texts, he claims to have discovered a 'narrative', 'story' or 'path metaphor' that, he maintains, is not to be confused with political doctrine.¹⁵ He tells us that the 'central themes of the canonical narrative'... include 'the proletariat's mission to conquer state power (*Macht, vlast*) in order to construct socialism' and 'the inspired and inspiring leadership required first to accept and then to carry out this mission'.¹⁶ In his introduction he 'unapologetically' admits that his 'understanding of Lenin and the Bolshevik outlook comes in large part from Lenin's closest allies and life-long comrades in arms: Zinoviev, Kamenyev, Krupskaya and, even the young Stalin'. (p.22) Later this narrow band of sources is broadened, and he claims to have found evidence of the canonical narrative also in the writings of Bukharin, Trotsky and Kollontai. (p.107) It is his contention that we would have a better understanding of the development of the Soviet régime if we paid more attention to the canonical narrative, and less to interpretations offered by historians.

As a prime example of the manner in which historians, neglecting 'Bolshevik stories', have misinterpreted the thinking and behaviour of Communist Party leaders, Lih chooses the period of siege economics between 1918 and 1921 that has been labelled 'war communism'. Scholars as distinguished, and as diverse, as E. H. Carr, Isaac Deutscher, Alec Nove, Laszlo Szamuely, Moshe Lewin, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Andrzej Walicki and Stephen Smith, are upbraided for having created a 'myth' of 'war communism'.¹⁷ According to Lih, the measures taken by Lenin's government between 1918 and March 1921 involving ever more draconian attempts to control all economic activity on Soviet territory, far from being a product of political dogma, represented a reluctant, pragmatic response to a political and economic emergency.¹⁸ It is certainly true that some of the features of 'siege communism' had been present in embryonic form in wartime measures adopted by the Tsarist and Provisional governments (mobilisation of production, centralisation of distribution, and price controls),¹⁹ and that the Civil War and Allied interventions in Russia added to the pre-existing social and economic upheaval. Nonetheless, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the ruling party's own mismanagement of the economy were also accelerators of Civil War and of continuing economic dislocation. Lih cites, and implicitly endorses, the assessment of Sergei Lukyanov (a liberal who had emigrated in 1918 but by 1921 had become a 'fellow-traveller'), that the Constituent Assembly was 'bankrupt, both politically and morally'.²⁰ 'A case can be made', Lih writes, that it could not possibly have responded to the challenges outlined by our writers'.²¹ Maybe, but that is not the point: a Constituent Assembly had been the objective of the RSDRP, Bolsheviks included, until 1917. In adopting Lenin's idea of a 'commune state', the RKP(b) broke not only with the mainstream of Russian social-democracy but also with the more broadly-supported representatives of agrarian socialism.²² With 'dictatorship', came inescapably, political and economic chaos and, of course, 'terror'.

Lih gives insufficient weight to the fact that *some* Marxists in Russia *did* see the political and economic system of 1918-1920 as a prototype (albeit an unstable prototype) of Communism. The economists Yuri Larin and Lev Kritsman are well known examples. Although Nikolai Bukharin, in his *Programme of the Communists* (1918) and in his *Economics of the Transition Period* (1920) 'emphasised the lengths and hardships of the journey', he cannot be excluded from this group. Lenin made his position clear on 12 October 1919, when he rejected the view of the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin that the Soviet government, with its centralisation of the management of production and restrictions on factory self-management, was employing forms of compulsion that reproduced those of the old régime. 'Unfortunately', Lenin wrote, there is an almost complete absence of real centralization'. Nor did he accept Chicherin's opinion that the party was presiding over a system of state capitalism: 'Not so; in my opinion our struggle belongs to *the first stage of a transition to communism*; [my emphasis] this struggle is

with the peasantry and with capitalist efforts to defend (or revive) commodity production.’²³ Of course, these prominent writers acknowledged that the system of 1918-1920 was a work in progress, but they certainly saw it as a step on the road to communism.²⁴

In his determination to explain the history of the inter-war period in terms of the Communists’ alleged ‘master narrative’, Lih’s interpretation more often than not turns into rationalisation. ‘The legitimate (*sic*) uses of coercion’, he writes, ‘and its relation to the pace of transformation can only be understood within the matrix of this story’. (pp.132-133) We are told that for Trotsky a ‘socialist régime has a particular right to apply compulsion for the public interest. Socialism means a universal obligation to work’. (pp.243-244) Paraphrasing Trotsky, he writes: ‘socialists have the right and duty to use compulsory methods in order to defend the proletarian *vlad!*’. That this was Trotsky’s view is not surprising: a justification of this policy had been published by Lenin in *Pravda* on 28 April 1918.²⁵ But leaving the matter there begs all the well-known questions concerning the degeneration of dictatorial régimes. There was no room for ‘thanks, but no thanks’ for those on the receiving end of compulsion. Was the policy, as Lih implies, really only applied to ‘slackers’?

Such is the redeeming power of the ‘canonical narrative’ that Lih even finds some ‘attractive human features’ in the ‘relatively populist version of Bolshevism’ of Grigorii Zinoviev. (pp.21, 259-260) He offers a ‘systematic survey of Zinoviev’s many speeches during his time in the top leadership of the ruling Bolshevik party’. But is there any evidence that these speeches were an expression of Zinoviev’s ‘internal ideology’, and not simply curated party rhetoric? In Lih’s survey we follow the contortions of the Communists in their attempt to reconcile their earlier role as champions of the hegemony of the working class with their policy of compromise with the peasants and small traders in the 1920s. (pp.273-275) As for Lih’s very forgiving portrait of Zinoviev, there is ample evidence in published material to suggest that Zinoviev’s reputation as Lenin’s ‘attack dog’, even before 1917, was well deserved.²⁶

A short review cannot do justice to the breadth of coverage of Lih’s book. However, the ‘canonical narrative’, that he claims to have discovered thanks to exegesis of selected texts, is hardly distinguishable from themes that were common in the propaganda of the Soviet Communist Party throughout its existence. Perhaps the most appropriate response to his search for an underlying ‘heroic scenario’, was pronounced in 1859 by Karl Marx, when he wrote: ‘Just as one cannot judge an individual by what they believe themselves to be, neither can one judge an era of upheaval according to its consciousness; rather one must explain this consciousness in terms of the contradictions of material life, in terms of the conflict existing between social productive forces and relations of production.’²⁷

Notes

- 1 See Ian D. Thatcher, 'The St Petersburg/Petrograd Mezhraionka, 1913-1917: The Rise and Fall of a Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party Unity Faction', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 87. No. 2 (April, 2009), pp.300-306. Upon their arrivals in Petrograd in 1917 both Trotsky and Uritsky had avoided the Lenin group and affiliated to the Mezhraionka.
- 2 The main groups of social-democratic internationalists who remained outside this new party were the group around Maksim Gorky's daily paper *Novaya zhizn'*, and the 'Menshevik-Internationalist' faction around Julius Martov. Andrei Bubnov later maintained that the congress had approved unification 'with all internationalists who had broken with the Menshevik Internationalists'. See his introduction to *Protokoly shestogo s'ezda RSDRP(b)*, Moscow, 1934, p.xxxvi.
- 3 For the membership of the Central Committee, see *Deyateli S.SSR i revolyutsionnogo dvizheniya Rossii*, Moscow, 1989, p.822.
- 4 See Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Programme of the RSDRP, in *Vtoroy S'ezd RSDRP. Iyun'-avgust 1903. Protokoly*, Moscow, 1959, p.42.
- 5 The topic does not figure in the protocols of the Congress convened by the Bolsheviks in London in 1905 while the upheavals of that year were in progress. See *Tretii S'ezd RSDRP aprel'-may 1905 goda. Protokoly*, Moscow, 1959.
- 6 See *Listovki Peterburgskikh bol'shevikov 1902-1917, Vol. I (1902-1907)*, Leningrad, 1939.
- 7 See 'Klassovye zadachi proletariata v sovremennyy moment demokraticeskoy revolyutsii', in *Chetvertyy (Ob'edinitel'nyy) S'ezd RSDRP aprel' (aprel'-mai) 1906 goda. Protokoly*, Moscow, 1959, pp.478-480.
- 8 *Pyatyy S'ezd RSDRP (may-iyun' 1907)*, Moscow, 1935, pp.638-639.
- 9 *Konferentsii RSDRP 1912 goda*, Moscow, 2008, p.450; and, for the full resolution, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, Moscow, 1977, p.468.
- 10 See the resolution 'On the political situation' in *Protokoly shestogo s'ezda RSDRP(b)*, Moscow, 1934, pp.238-241.
- 11 See the Decree of the Central Executive Committee of 16 January 1918 and the declaration of Yakov Sverdlov in James Bunyan and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918. Documents and Materials*, Stanford CA, 1934, pp.369 and 371.
- 12 Lenin had proposed a revision of the party's programme in his 'April Theses' and the matter had been under discussion during 1917. See *Sed'moy Ekstrennyy S'ezd RKP (b), Mart 1918. Stenograficheskiy otchet* (Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri TsK KPSS, 1962), p.177 and p.382, n.109. In March 1918, a review commission was set up, consisting of Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Stalin, Smirnov, Sokol'nikov, Stalin and Zinoviev, with Radek and Obolensky as candidate members. However, it was not until the Congress of March 1919 that a new programme was adopted.
- 13 *Sed'moy Ekstrennyy S'ezd RKP (b)*, p.176.
- 14 *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). Short Course*. Authorised by the Central Committee of the CPSU (B) in 1938 (English language ed., Moscow, 1939). On p.12 of Chapter 4 we are told that the Bolsheviks constituted

- themselves 'an independent Marxist Party' at the Prague Conference of January 1912. 'Bolshevik Party' figures in the titles of following chapters, accordingly.
- 15 The theorists from whom Lih has derived his analytical approach are named in Chapter 5, footnote 2.
 - 16 Lih explains in detail what he means by 'canonical narrative' in Chapter 5.
 - 17 See Chapter 3. In Chapter 10, p.252, Lih writes that historians have been 'next to unanimous' (*sic*) in maintaining that the Bolsheviks 'viewed the institutions of 1920 as an embodiment of full socialism and as an admirable long-term system'.
 - 18 See, for example, Chapter 10 in which the Communist leadership is represented as valiantly struggling to cope with a crisis exacerbated by a civil war for which they were themselves at least partly responsible.
 - 19 See, for example, Vladimir Mau and Irina Starodubrovskaya, *The Challenge of Revolution. Contemporary Russia in Historical Perspective*, Oxford, 2001, pp.114 passim.
 - 20 Lukyanov was a contributor to the anthology *Smena vekh* ('Change of Landmarks') published in Prague in 1921. He later became one of the editors of a newspaper of the same name, published in Paris, and of its successor, *Nakanune*, published in Berlin. Both papers were subsidised by the Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.
 - 21 See Lih, pp.219-225 and pp.233-234. He accuses liberal historians of fetishising the Constituent Assembly.
 - 22 Although the first Soviet government did include representatives of the recently-formed Party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, at the Constituent Assembly elections the mainstream agrarian socialists of the 'Right' Socialist-Revolutionary Party had won 370 deputies, whereas the Left SRs had won only 40. See Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p.371, n.74.
 - 23 V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineniy*, Vol. 51, Moscow, 1970, p.357. One might add that Lih is mistaken in thinking that the term 'war communism had no currency during 1918-1921', and that 'Lenin coined the term in 1921 as part of his efforts to justify and popularize NEP'. In fact, it was used as early as 1918 by Aleksandr Bogdanov in his *Voprosy sotsializma*, reviewed by Bukharin in *Kommunist* (1918), No. 3, pp.19-20.
 - 24 On this subject, see James D. White, *Lenin. The Practice and Theory of Revolution*, London, 2001, pp.163-166.
 - 25 See 'The current tasks of the Soviet government', *Pravda*, 28 April 1918, in particular the sections 'Raising the productivity of labour' and 'Harmonious organisation and dictatorship'. Before being published, Lenin's article was approved by the Central Committee of the RKP(b). See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, Moscow, 1972, pp.235-277 and pp.580-581, n.99.
 - 26 See for example Zinoviev's interventions from 1911, recorded in the minutes of the meetings of the Organisation Commission for an 'all-party conference' that was never held, in *Konferentsii RSDRP 1912 goda*.
 - 27 Karl Marx, 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', translated from 'Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie' in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 13, Berlin, 1961, p.9.

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.

Joe Craig
Belfast

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 Hecksher 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

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