

## Reviews

### We're Labour's countless

**Boris Dralyuk, *1917: Stories and Poems from the Russian Revolution*, Pushkin Press, 2016, 236 pages, paperback, ISBN 9781782272144, £8.99**

It was, as Charles Dickens said of another period, the best of times and the worst of times. Whereas, in 1902, Lenin had thought the great question of the day must be 'What is to be done?', by 1919, according to Mikhail Bulgakov, most people were asking 'What will become of us?'. These are two quite different perspectives on the unknowns of the future, each in its own way as practical as the other. Lenin sought to do things, or to get things done, but the people whose voices Bulgakov was channelling, no matter who was in power, had already had and would later have things done to them, if occasionally on their behalf. No matter how actively involving the Revolution may have seemed and been, vast numbers were its passive beneficiaries and victims.

Somewhere between the doing and the being done-to, writers appraised the frail hopes and sturdy fears of their fellow Russians. Often judiciously opting to tell their stories obliquely, they made creative opportunities out of the anticipation of censorship. Eventually, their task would extend, crucially, to the humanising of dehumanisation; but in the meantime, before the worse came to the worst, we encounter stories and poems that are surprisingly jaunty. The overall tone of this anthology, if many moods can be boiled down to one, is sceptically hopeful rather than hopeless. Boris Dralyuk, who recently co-edited the excellent *Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, has chosen poetry and prose fiction dating from between February 1917, when the Romanovs were deposed, to late 1919, when the momentum of the Civil War finally turned in the Bolsheviks' favour.

Just these two and a half years cannot give the full story of the Revolution, of course. As Dralyuk explains in an editorial note, his aim was to 'steep the reader' in the immediacy of events, 'to recreate the heady brew of enthusiasm and disgust, passion and trepidation that intoxicated Russia and the world as the events unfolded'. To this end, he decided to exclude retrospective pieces – commemorative poetry, memoirs and so forth, as well as propagandistic accounts, whether fictional or non-, giving an approved version of history – and instead to evoke the passions of the time in relatively quick work quickly published.

Not that this means he has had to fall back on material of low quality:

the writers here include, among the authors of fiction, Yevgeny Zamyatin and Mikhail Bulgakov; and, among the poets, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Mikhail Kuzmin, Sergey Esenin and Vladimir Mayakovsky. In brief interstitial essays, Dralyuk introduces the writers, contextualises their stories or poems, and explains any references the reader may not be familiar with. In truth, he makes such a good job of this that the life stories he tells are sometimes more interesting than the literature they introduce.

As you would expect from the literature of the previous two centuries, Mother Russia puts in an appearance, though somewhat transformed for the worse:

‘Oh, my motherland, doomed and punished, endowed with a cruel grace for the purity of your heart, you lie cast down on the greensward, I see you in the smoke of bonfires beneath bullets, and your plaits are spread out on the earth ... Oh my doomed motherland, punished by God, visited by god! ... Your name will be wiped out, you will perish, and who will remember you ever existed?’

(This is Alexey Remizov in his bloated prose poem, ‘The Lay of the Ruin of Rus’.) Sides are taken, of course, and mass groups are characterised according to the shared qualities or deficiencies that serve individual authors’ political requirements. Stereotypes are purveyed accordingly. As described by Alexander Blok,

The bourgeois stands, a hungry cur,  
a question mark, a question begged,  
behind him crouches the old world –  
a mongrel, tail between its legs.

In ‘The Guillotine’, a story by ‘Teffi’ (Nadezhda Lokhvitskaya), the upper classes absurdly still treat traipsing off to their deaths as a part of the social season. Taking the assembled material as a whole, the more touching generalisation the book offers, regardless of class, is of a populace quite unable to keep up with the pace of change.

Many of the chosen texts consider, if only between the lines, the perennial question of the relationship between the individual – the ‘ordinary’ individual, not the hero – and history. A character in a story by Alexander Grin says, of the onset of the ‘Great Revolution’: ‘I expected to fall in love with that historical moment and to experience the joy of the magician who enters palaces and temples with the help of a magic poppy seed’. (There is a surprising number of magicians in the book.) What he saw instead, he says, was a lot less magical. ‘I clearly saw who had holes

in his boots, who was taking sedative drops, and who went where to buy his butter. I saw that it was raining, that the yard-keepers were sweeping the pavements and that a man's legs grew weary from walking just as they had in the times of Caesar and Marat'. He got used to conversations about Zeppelin raids and hunger strikes. In the end, he says, 'I became *just* as bored with it all as I had been before the war'. He later kills himself.

Although this is not a book about the Caesars and Marats, it does tell us a lot more about writers and their concerns than about the really ordinary ordinaries. The gap was not always huge, since many of these writers were themselves living in penury, and many would die of their ideas. Even so, there is not much here at the class level required by social realism, whether Red or White. Where the masses are in evidence they are, indeed, seen through a hole in a boot or the sweeping of a pavement. That is to say, the broad sweep of history is depicted in the details of the particular; but detail not in a nineteenth-century profusion of minute observation. Rather, in symbolic objects and moments. Nor is the tone grandiose; not yet. Not grandiose, perhaps, but there is a grandeur in the effect. This is the true reward of Dralyuk's approach.

*Gregory Woods*

## **We**

We're Labour's countless, awe-inspiring legions.  
We are the conquerors of seas, of oceans and of land.  
We've lit the city with the light of artificial suns,  
our proud souls blazing with rebellion.

We're seized by mutinous and zealous drunkenness.  
Let them decry: 'You're beauty's executioners!'  
We'll burn up Raphael for our Tomorrow's sake,  
trample art's flowers and destroy museums.

We've cast off the oppressive burden of tradition  
rejected the chimeras of its bloodless wisdom.  
Venus de Milo cannot match the vision  
of young girls in our future's shining kingdom.

Our eyes have dried, all tenderness is dead –  
we can't recall the smell of grass or of spring flowers.  
We've fallen for the song of sirens, wheels and shafts,  
the might of steam and dynamite's explosive power ...

Oh, poet-aesthetes, curse us – the Great Brute you fear!  
 Kneel, kiss the splinters of the past beneath our feet,  
 and wash the ruins of the shattered temple with your tears.  
 We breathe another beauty – we are brave and free!

The muscles of our hands crave labour on a giant scale,  
 and our collective chest burns with creation's torment.  
 We fill our combs with honey till they spill,  
 and find a new, dazzling direction for our planet.

We love life, with its heady and exuberant delight.  
 Our spirit's tempered by a battle fierce and raw.  
 We're all and everywhere – the flame of victory, its light.  
 We're our own Deity and Judge and Law.

*Vladimir Kirillov (trans. Boris Dralyuk)*

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### **Iron Flowers**

I forged my iron flowers  
 beneath a workshop's smoky dome –  
 not amid nature's tender bowers,  
 or beauty in full bloom.

They weren't caressed by Southern sunshine  
 or cradled by the moon –  
 my thunderous bouquet was burnished  
 in a forge's fiery storm.

Where motors rumble, rude and awful,  
 where sirens whistle, metal rings,  
 I was entranced, I fell in love with  
 the chime of copper pines.

This workshop dance was tiring,  
 my palms were hard as rocks –  
 but a never-tiring fire  
 blazed in my chest, beneath my smock.

Fed by the dream of Communism,  
I fed the furnace with new power,  
intoxicated by its rhythm,  
I forged my iron flowers.

*Mikhail Gerasimov (trans. Boris Dralyuk)*

### Slum Vote

**Kathryn Rix, *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England 1880-1910*, The Boydell Press, 2016, 278 pages, hardback ISBN 9780861933402, £50**

Political histories are usually focused on people and events rather than processes. This study is different. It is a meticulous examination of the changing role of party political agents in the short but significant period 1880 to 1910. At this time, the two main political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals, were struggling to adapt to a significantly different political landscape. More householders had been given the vote with the 1884 Reform Act and this, combined with reorganisation into mainly single member constituencies along with the introduction of county councils (1888) and parish and district councils (1894) meant that a much greater emphasis had to be placed on party organisation than had been the case before.

Over this period, the constituency agents of both parties changed in professional background. In 1880, the typical agent was a part-time solicitor who fitted the agent's administrative tasks between the work of their legal practice. By 1910, this arrangement could no longer be sustained within these parties. The job had become too complex. They had to register voters, manage an election campaign, and oversee the social and educational activities of local party associations. As a consequence, the job was more likely to be undertaken by full time, professional agents.

Kathryn Rix's book is scrupulously and very thoroughly researched. It is designed to be a study in 'the interconnectedness of politics', that is, the linkages between what the author refers to as 'elite' and 'popular' politics. Effective agents were critical to the functioning of electoral politics in this period but their role has often been overlooked. The author refers to Sir Robert Hudson, chief Liberal agent in 1909, whose explanation of this invisibility was that agents were more akin to the 'grimy engineers' below deck who keep a ship afloat rather than the highly visible, charming, gold-

braided officers at the prow. Though agents might never be seen, just like engineers, they were essential.

There are three main themes in Dr Rix's research. The first is the way in which the role of agents was professionalised and the exact nature of what she calls 'professionalised politics'. She questions the extent to which political life during these years was 'modernised' or 'nationalised', looking at the impact of local concerns – and the activities of party agents locally – on party politics between 1884 and the First World War.

Secondly, she explores the nature and significance of party activity at a local level during this period. The balance of power between the Conservative Party and Liberal Party changes quite dramatically over this time with 'Conservative hegemony' ending in 1906 with the Liberals' success in the general election. Dr Rix provides a comparative study of these two established parties making the point that the extent to which 'the ideals and beliefs espoused by each party's members were reflected not only in the policies that they presented to the electorate, but also in the organisational structures and methods through which they sought to cultivate their political appeal'.

Rix explains that at least some of the difference between the two parties was social. She touches on the 'beer, billiards and "baccy"' to be found in one study of West Yorkshire Conservative clubs, while another study uncovered the qualms which the Liberal-backed North of England Newspaper Company had about publishing betting news when it knew its readers/supporters might well be more temperance-oriented. Her main focus here, however, is the agents and their backgrounds so that she is able to identify similarities and differences between their views and the cultural expectations of the political party they were working for. Dr Rix found, for example, that some Liberal agents realised the importance of the social side in terms of attracting voters while HQ and at least a few Conservative agents recognised that political education as much as 'beer and bonhomie' would secure votes for Conservative candidates.

The final theme covered in her research concentrates on examining the shifting relationship between the local and national over this thirty year period. Some historians have emphasised the emergence of 'class politics' during this time. Others have tried to identify the point at which the local gave way to the national in terms of what she calls 'the principal focus of electoral politics'. Again she focuses on the agents' role as intermediaries to 'explore how the interactions between the local, regional and national dimension of politics shaped electoral culture between 1880 and 1910'. This is not quite as dry as it sounds. For example, the author looks at

canvassing. Were there instructions about how to canvass sent to agents from party HQ or did agents themselves develop techniques which they shared across their professional networks? How was political literature (increasingly used in campaigns during this period) created? How much influence did local members or agents have in terms of its content?

This thirty year period was selected because it was an important time in electoral politics. The new single member constituencies were much larger than their predecessors. Over two million more people were enfranchised – mainly male householders and lodgers (the so-called ‘slum vote’). Registration procedures became far more complicated. Anti-corruption legislation meant that it became harder to stay within the law in relation to entertainment or canvassing. Dr Rix concentrates almost entirely on the Conservative and Liberal Parties. Although they were dominant for this period it must be said that, by 1910, the Labour Party had 42 MPs (elected largely without paid, full time professional agents). It would have strengthened the book a lot if the fledgling Labour Party had received more attention. Only four paragraphs outline what Rix considers to be contradictory attitudes towards the employment of any paid help with voter registration and electioneering. It is true that some areas worked with Liberal Party members locally to ensure that registration and electioneering work was done within the law. Others were clearly suspicious of the paperwork and procedures and focused more on campaigning.

*Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England 1880-1910* is over two hundred pages long, is printed in a small typeface, and has even smaller, detailed footnotes on most pages. There are no photographs. Clearly, this is a scholarly tome. The language is constrained and highly referenced. Useful for academics and students of politics, it is more likely to be dipped into than read cover to cover. This is a pity, but through adept use of the index and skim-reading it is possible to find lots of ‘hidden gems’.

For example, voter registration was not straightforward. Despite the extension of the franchise, there was an anti working-class bias operating in the overly complex procedures and agents’ willingness to challenge some registrations, especially if they felt that the voter would support the opposition. But it could go further than that. For example, in 1891, the treasurer of the Conservative Association in Clapham tried to get partitions built between the beds in the policemen’s dormitory in Smedley Street Police Station. His reasoning was that if they could register as lodgers, the Conservative vote would be enhanced (the assumption was that they would be more likely to vote Conservative). He failed.

The Liberals were the first to use horse-drawn vans to promote their

cause with ‘paid speakers who showed lantern slides, gave addresses and distributed literature. It was especially useful in remote areas as it provided a platform and accommodation for speakers.’ The Conservatives were quick to follow, especially as they considered that the rural vote was more likely to be Conservative. In December 1907, partly in response to ‘the growth of Socialism’ the NUCCA (see below)

‘launched an unprecedented campaign, dispatching twenty vans which by May 1908 had covered 24,600 miles and held 4,834 meetings, attended by 1,411,000 people. These were offered to regional organisers for a second campaign and sent to seaside resorts during the summer ...’

Local agents often accompanied these tours.

Finally, both parties encouraged candidates to use sporting activities to broaden their local appeal – kicking off at football matches, producing football-oriented editions of electoral material, attending matches and holding official positions in football, tennis and cricket clubs. But it was not always easy or welcomed. One Liberal MP at a meeting in 1894 tried to liven up a speech with some football metaphors and ‘was interrupted by a heckler’... ‘Off-side!’ he shouted. A picture of one or two of these activities would certainly have brought a smile.

*Cathy Davis and Alan Wigfield*

*NUCCA was the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations.*

## **Touched**

***Touched* played at Nottingham Playhouse from 17 February to 4 March 2017. The text is published by Nick Hern Books (ISBN 9781854599254), £9.99**

At last, the space deepens to dawn’s luminous curve, beneath a flowering tree. Plucked Japanese strings translate Nottingham’s Colwick Woods to Hiroshima’s wide river. Our companions from city’s Sneinton district squat and recline on stage as an almighty flash, swiftly followed by loud atomic blast, vapourises all and everyone in its path. ‘They got off lightly,’ Mary, a lady in her early fifties, had said, a little earlier. ‘A couple of towns bombed, and it’s all over. We took it for six years.’

Stephen Lowe’s *Touched*, revived at Nottingham Playhouse 40 years on from its 1977 premiere there, stirs new thoughts in Brexitland. ‘I’m not the



Photo Robert Day

black,' insists Joan to her half-sister Betty, as she tries to induce Sandra, her full sister, to miscarry a phantom pregnancy. What will Albert, Sandra's detested husband, say when he eventually returns from Australia, where he's recuperating from his experiences in a prisoner-of-war camp in Burmah? Meanwhile, their young son has been killed in a road accident during the blackout.

Later, Sandra suggests the father of her phantom infant might be an 'I-tie' from the nearby prisoner-of-war camp, where some local women queued at the gate, waiting for the Italian men to be let out on Sunday afternoons. Even Joan ('I'm no angel') balks at the thought of coupling with the enemy. Earlier, Pauline, Joan's eight-year-old daughter, softly sang 'Land of Hope and Glory', accompanying Prime Minister Churchill as he announced Germany's surrender on what became known as Victory in Europe (VE) Day.

*Touched* unfolds across 100 days from VE Day on 8 May 1945 to Victory in Japan (VJ) Day, on 15 August, following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sneinton's confined terraces push the actors front of stage, intermittently transforming to high, movable screens which are opened and closed like sliding doors in flimsy Japanese dwellings. At times, they seem to portend the mighty Iron Curtain that Churchill was soon to see descended across the continent of Europe. At other times, the screened backdrop serves as Colwick Woods, high on a ridge above the Trent Valley, while Sandra lays out her fateful picnic. Yes, she had

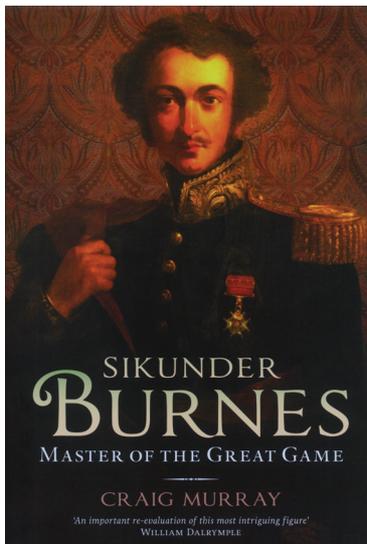
encountered her Italian, and not imagined it, as she fears. Johnny, seventeen-year-old prone to fits, and therefore unfit to fight, had watched.

In 2006, Stephen Lowe remarked that his works were ‘highly subjective, intensely personal pieces’ and that he hoped they will ‘make connection on an equally personal level’ with each member of an audience. He recalled his own relationship during his teens with an elder woman, ‘not unlike Johnny’s’, and how he had eventually come to see that Sandra was ‘strongly based’ on that woman who had later committed suicide. He drew a parallel between Sandra’s sense of isolation in this intimate backstreet society and his own in the mid 1970s, which seemed to have ‘given up the radical hope and aspirations that had ... dominated the sixties and ... had created a major peace campaign of some strength, particularly against the war in Vietnam but also the nuclear threat’.

Aisling Loftus as Joan and Vicky McClure as Sandra banter and bicker like Nottingham sisters, while George Boden counterposes diffident Johnny, desperate for Attlee’s new Labour Government to win its landslide victory and change Britain for the better. In the neglected literature of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Lowe’s intimate drama occupies a prominent place.

*Tony Simpson*

### The Great Game then and now



**Craig Murray, *Sikunder Burnes: Master of the Great Game*, Birlinn, 2016, 448 pages, hardback ISBN 9781780273174, £25**

As we are being assailed regularly by new examples of ‘Russophobia’, it is worth reading Craig Murray’s new book, *Sikunder Burnes*, a biography of a very interesting Scot, Alexander Burnes, who was an early diplomat (and spy) for British imperialism in India and Afghanistan, in what became known as ‘The Great Game’.

I should begin this review by declaring an interest. Craig Murray is a

good friend of mine who stayed with me in Edinburgh when he returned to Scotland, and has been a fellow struggler for Scottish independence. *Spokesman* readers will remember Craig Murray came to public notice as our ambassador to Uzbekistan, who, despite being ordered to do so by Labour Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, refused to cover up torture and instead condemned it publicly (see *Spokesman* 95). Jack Straw sacked Craig Murray for this and then tried to vilify his name. Craig overturned all these attempts and since has become a well-known author, whistleblower and blogger who supports human rights. Jack Straw has, of course, like his leader Blair, been condemned by the court of history on the Iraq war along with Afghanistan. This latest foray into The Great Game, as Craig shows, has ended in ignominy and defeat, just like our first intervention.

Craig Murray was a diplomat who trained as a historian at Dundee University and got a first in history, which launched him into a fast track career in the Foreign Office. He is also a successful author whose book, *Murder in Samarkand*, detailing his time as ambassador to Uzbekistan, became a bestseller.

This new biography of Alexander Burnes uses all Craig's historical skills and he has spent eight years writing it. I have discussed *Sikunder Burnes* with Craig over the years he has been researching and writing whilst travelling to India to document it. He has, in my opinion, produced a fine book about an important part of British imperialist history which not only tells a story about our past but also has striking relevance for today. For example, Burnes' reports to the British government about India and Afghanistan were often covered up and distorted by the British foreign secretary to Parliament, just like Blair did with his 'weapons of mass destruction' over Iraq.

Alexander Burnes was a remarkable young Scot and a relative of the great poet Robert Burns who, like many young Scots in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, made his career in the British Empire. Viewers of the recent excellent BBC television series 'Taboo' will realise that the East India Company was the first and most powerful global capitalist corporation which ran much of the British Empire. Many of its key staff were Scots like Burnes who were well educated in Scottish schools and universities. Around a quarter of all District Commissioners were Scots and most of the doctors in India were trained at Edinburgh University. I remember going on a delegation to meet the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in Northern India, in the foothills of the Himalayas, and next to it was a village called Macleod Gange with a little Scots Presbyterian church whose graveyard

contained the names of many Scots who had helped to build the Empire.

Burnes was born in Montrose in 1805 and educated in the town where his father was the Provost. He died 36 years later, hacked to death in Kabul. In between, Burnes secured a commission in the Indian Army, taught himself Hindu and Persian, as well as statistics and surveying, and provided valuable reports to the British government, particularly on the situation in Northern India and Afghanistan. Sadly, his reports, which should have informed British Foreign policy, were often suppressed, ignored or distorted. Sounds familiar!

Craig Murray's book is a serious and detailed history of more than 400 pages with detailed footnotes. However, it is never dull and contains interesting accounts of the personal lives of Burnes and his contemporaries, including their sex lives, which were often colourful.

Burnes' death in Kabul, after a mistaken attempt to install a British puppet ruler (sounds familiar again!), led to the first British invasion of Afghanistan, which ended in failure, just like the last one. British imperialism, having failed to learn the lessons of history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, repeated them recently and, in its current failed policy in the Middle East, shows no sign of learning them. Clearly, all British diplomats should be required to read Craig's book as part of their Foreign Office training, but I'm not holding my breath. An independent Scotland of the future should certainly use Craig's knowledge and talents, perhaps as head of Scotland's Foreign Office?!

*Hugh Kerr*

*Hugh Kerr was a Labour Member of the European Parliament who was expelled from the Labour Party, along with Ken Coates, for opposing Blair's policies.*

[www.birlinn.co.uk](http://www.birlinn.co.uk)

### **Genocide's family history**

**Philippe Sands, *East West Street*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2017, 496 pages, paperback ISBN 9781474601917, £9.99**

Philippe Sands, a Professor of Law at University College London, has written a number of books and made a film on international human rights. In *East West Street*, he is particularly concerned with the contribution to the legal theory behind the concepts of two international lawyers, Hersch Lauterpacht (1897-1960) and Rafael Lemkin (1900-1959).

Curiously enough, the author's own family and the families of both Lauterpacht and Lemkin, which are all Jewish, originate in the vicinity of the town known variously as Lemberg, Lvov or Lviv. This is today in Ukraine, but since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has passed between Austria-Hungary, Russia, Poland and Germany. As Jews, members of the three families suffered appalling persecution by the Nazis during the Second World War. Those who failed to get out were murdered along with an estimated four million Jews on what was then Polish territory. Philippe Sands decided to embark upon an intensive search for survivors of the three families and sources of information on those no longer alive to build up family histories which, in some cases, stretch over five generations. He also researched the history of another family – that of Hans Frank – who was the Nazi Governor of German-occupied Poland. Frank was tried at Nuremberg after the war, sentenced to death, and ultimately hanged on 16 October 1946. His wife, Brigitte, and their five children, went from luxurious living to penury in the immediate post-war period and suffered the pain and anguish of Hans Frank's trial and execution. Philippe Sands sought out Hans Frank's youngest son, Niklas, who was 73 years of age in 2012. He had pursued a career as a journalist. In September 1946, when he was aged seven, he visited his father in prison. His father assured him that he would be home for Christmas, which he afterwards realised was a lie. He accepted that his father should have been put on trial.

Sands was introduced by Niklas Frank to Horst von Wachter, the son of Otto von Wachter, who served as the Nazi governor of Distrikt Galician and was in communication with Himmler. Horst von Wachter reluctantly accepted that his father was part of the Nazi system but tried to argue that he could not leave it. Otto von Wachter was indicted for war crimes by the post-war Polish government, but went into hiding in the Vatican and died in mysterious circumstances in 1949.

Apart from recounting the history of the various family members, one of the main aims of *East West Street* is to explain and applaud the work of Hersch Lauterpacht and Rafael Lemkin in shaping international law on human rights. Lauterpacht drafted Sir Hartley Shawcross's address to the Nuremberg Court, and Lemkin worked with the American prosecution team at Nuremberg. Although Lauterpacht rejected the concept of genocide, which was a central feature of Lemkin's outlook (see *Spokesman* 93), both of them contributed to the development of international law on human rights, which has expanded greatly since the end of the Second World War.

The idea of an international court has now been established and the

United Nations International Law Commission has been set up. Philippe Sands himself works on cases involving genocide or crimes against humanity across the globe. In November 1998, the House of Lords ruled that Senator Augustus Pinochet, former President of Chile, could not claim immunity from the jurisdiction of the English courts as the acts of torture for which he was said to have been responsible constituted a crime against humanity. This reflected a changing outlook. Sands cites other examples to support his case that the world attitude to human rights is being transformed – a development which, he argues, Lauterpacht and Lemkin have helped to achieve.

*East West Street* covers a fascinating human story about the effects of unjust racist laws on ordinary families, a full exposure once again of the horrors of Nazism, and a presentation of the case for outlawing abuses of human rights at the international level. It contains a very detailed index, which enables readers to check or review the content of what they have read. The book won the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-fiction and was considered for others. It is a gripping text which is well worth reading. Philippe Sands has made an important contribution to the dissemination of information on human rights and international law.

*Stan Newens*

### **Blood, sweat and tears**

**Richard Rhodes, *Hell and Good Company: The Spanish Civil War and the World It Made*, Simon and Schuster, 2015, 320 pages, hardback ISBN 9781415696219, £20, paperback ISBN 9781471126185, £8.99, eBook ISBN 9781451696233, £7.99**

This is a real hotchpotch of a book, cutting from the Front (mostly where the American International Brigades, Lincoln and Washington, were fighting), to storage of blood in field hospitals, to the artistic birth pants of Miró and Picasso's famous paintings, *Still Life with an Old Shoe* and *Guernica*, and on to the famous names, Orwell, Hemingway, Gellhorn and Herbert Matthews, the indefatigable reporter, and J. B. S. Haldane, the British scientist. Then jumping back to one of the others. It is all over the place. You never know what or who is going to pop up next, but it doesn't matter; indeed, it makes for a most interesting read. The author makes no pretence of objectivity, obviously loathing Franco and the Nationalist cause, but he doesn't hide the darker side of the Republican one, especially

the massacres of prisoners held in the Carcel Modelo during the siege of Madrid.

Perhaps the most interesting part of *Hell and Good Company*, because the least well known, is about the development of field hospitals under an American, Edward Barsky, a Canadian, Norman Bethune, and Frederic Durán-Jordà, a Catalan. They, along with others, developed blood transfusions and techniques of storing blood, as well as revolutionary forms of dressings for open fractures and wounds, which were all to prove useful in the Second World War. They would not have got anywhere without the nurses, of course. One name stands out: Patience Darton, a 25-year-old Englishwoman. They were all so incredibly brave, loyal, dedicated and determined – their names deserve to be better known.

Patience Darton and brigadier Robert Aaquist, a German Jew from Palestine, provide the romantic interest. They fell in love and ‘married’ in the informal International Brigade way, but their relationship was frequently interrupted by long times apart because of the call of duty. He was killed at the Battle of the Ebro. And that is about as romantic as it gets. Many joined the Republican side with romantic ideals, but the reality of war quickly knocked out the romance and the idealism began to corrode at the depths. This darker, destructive side is well documented by Orwell himself in *Homage to Catalonia* and Paul Preston’s *The Last Stalinist: The Life of Santiago Carrillo*, as well as Ken Loach’s excellent film *Land and Freedom*. It’s a sad day when you are as afraid of your own side as you are of the enemy.

So, to the more familiar names: Picasso was suffering from artist’s block when he was galvanised by the bombing of Guernica to produce his masterpiece. An analysis of its step-by-step creation is made in some detail, so a copy would have been useful, but the author probably thought there are enough reproductions around, which is true enough.

Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is another famous work to come out of the Spanish Civil War. It was apparently Fidel Castro’s favourite novel, which I find hard to believe as it is trashy Hollywood nonsense. The only good things in it are some wonderful descriptions of the terrain and, ironically, the murder of Nationalists by Republicans, all citizens of a small town. If you have ever seen the Gary Cooper-Ingrid Bergman film version, you have read the book. I always think of Hemingway as a braggart and boor but here he receives fairly sympathetic treatment. He was brave and generous, sharing all the goodies he obtained with other reporters, intellectuals, novelists and hangers-on at the Hotel Florida in Madrid where they regularly partied.

Yet, they all, even Picasso, safe in Paris, seem somehow a little decadent and precious alongside the heroes fighting at the front and the brave people trying to bind them up when sick or wounded, often in appalling conditions. Think of Orwell, stuck in his trench and a bullet through his throat. No time for sensitive artistic feelings. It really was blood, sweat and tears with fear and great courage thrown in.

*Nigel Potter*

### **Never Again War**

**Lyn Smith, *People Power: Fighting for Peace from the First World War to the Present*, 256 pages, 197 illustrations, 2017, Thames and Hudson in association with Imperial War Museums, hardback ISBN 9780500519158, £24.95**

This is a remarkable book. It ought to be in every trade union, school, parish and local authority library. It is primarily a record of opposition to war, its pages filled with peacemaking campaigns and personalities. Brian Haw for instance. Brian held his ten-year vigil in Parliament Square against all wars. He gets a special mention in Sheila Hancock's powerful introduction. She not only has some very sensible comments to make but some very pointed ones. Art, she says, has too often become a 'beautiful veneration of war rather than a reminder of the grotesque ugliness of suffering'.

*People Power* has five sections, but the last has an ambiguous heading: 'The New World Order'. It is still the old world order in a different dressing. Militarism and Might still dominate and are glorified whenever possible, even in this age of nuclear weapons. Sheila Hancock is, I hope, right, when she says that attitudes to war are changing. This book is a record of many of those over the last hundred years who have made that change possible. The very first picture comes from Käthe Kollwitz whose son was killed in the First World War. Its title? *Never Again War*. See p.114.

Early in Lyn Smith's account we hear about the brave women's conference in The Hague in 1915, aimed at ending the war. The story of opposition to conscription when it came in 1916, with conscientious objectors (COs) in prison and even under sentence of death in France, is well described.

Then came the interwar years, with the foundation and hopes of the League of Nations – which Britain did so much to dash. The failure of the

League was followed by the rise of Hitler.

Canon Dick Sheppard and the rise of the Peace Pledge Union is featured, and the League of Nations Union, with its 400,000 members. There is a photograph of our much respected Vera Brittain in her First World War nurse's uniform, who became such a prominent advocate for the peace movement.

So we rolled into the Second World War with many of those who had refused previously – for example, Fenner Brockway – now becoming supporters of military action or even soldiers, if reluctant ones.

One of the most unusual of those who said 'NO' was William Douglas-Home, brother of the future Prime Minister. His 'NO' came when he, an officer in the armoured corps, was ordered to open fire on a city packed with civilians. He spent a year in prison as a result. As we see in this fascinating book, the courage to say 'NO' comes in many different forms.

Post-1945 came the Cold War, and with it new movements. Of course CND, and the Greenham Women, are well illustrated but, inevitably, there are gaps in a story that covers one hundred years. The Campaign Against the Arms Trade, Pax Christi, and the United Nations Association do not get a mention. *Housmans Directory* lists over ten pages of peace and human rights groups active in the UK today.

I realise that this is only an episodic review of an encouraging and informative book. Lyn Smith has done us all a great service in recording so much that might have been forgotten, and has given us so many reasons for hope. I urge you to get hold of a copy of *People Power* and read it! Attitudes do change and this book is a record of that change in process.

*Bruce Kent*

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Cover photo:

*Ministry of Defence, London, 18 February 1961*

*'Lord Russell (Bertrand Russell), President of the Committee of 100, leads a demonstration to the Ministry of Defence. The demonstration was timed to coincide with the arrival in the Clyde of the depot ship carrying Polaris missiles, and outside the Ministry of Defence some of the Committee staged a "sit down" demonstration.'*

*Sport & General Press Agency*

Overleaf: *'Nie Wieder Krieg' (Never Again War) by Käthe Kollwitz, 1924* ►