

Reviews

Korea nuclear standoff

Glyn Ford, *Talking to North Korea: Ending the Nuclear Standoff*, Pluto Press, 2018, 320 pages, ISBN 978074337852, £14.99

Glyn Ford has returned to the Democratic Republic of North Korea nearly 50 times since his first visit in 1997 as a Member of the European Parliament. As a result, he has become one of the best informed experts on that country in the western world. He argues in this extremely detailed review of the DRNK since it first came into existence on 9th September, 1948, that it is not a Stalinist state, as normally regarded in the West, but a communist state which has metamorphosed into a theocracy. This is his interpretation of the cult of Kim Il Sung and his ancestors and descendants, which is a prominent feature of the state. Glyn Ford traces the history of the state, after explaining how it came into existence as the result of a division of interest between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Korean Peninsula after the ending of nearly half a century of colonial rule by Japan in 1945.

Kim Il Sung, a communist who had fought with the Chinese Communist Party in Manchuria, set up a communist state in the north with Moscow's backing, while the Americans supported Syngman Rhee, a committed anti-communist, as head of state in the south. From the outset there was conflict, uprisings and savage repression and, on 25 June, 1950, 90,000 North Korean troops crossed into the south and overran the Peninsula. The Americans secured a vote in the UN condemning this as aggression and organised a counterattack which drove the North Koreans back into the north. This led the Chinese Communists to send a massive force which drove the Americans and their allies back. A cessation of hostilities was finally achieved which left Korea divided between north and south, at a cost of the lives of four million Koreans, 144,000 Americans, and 14,000 members of the coalition's forces.

The collapse of the USSR in 1990 cut off generous assistance and subsidies to the DRNK, leading to famine, which, according to the UN Food & Agriculture Organisation, caused between 80,000 and three million deaths. Recovery was achieved after 1995, assisted by a rapprochement to the European Union, which supplied both food and technical assistance to improve crop yields. *Médecins sans Frontières* and other organisations assisted with this.

This led to the growth of farmers' markets, promoting economic reform

and productivity. Not only food, but handicrafts and manufactures were traded through markets.

Kim Il Sung died on 8 July 1994 and, after a three-year period of mourning, was succeeded by his son, Kim Jong Il, in 1997. Kim Jong Il purged various ministers and took charge of the army. There was no drive to unite with the south, as the gross domestic product of the north was equivalent to only 2% of that of the south. However, Kim Jong Il oversaw considerable economic recovery.

As Kim Jong Il was 67 years of age, the question of his successor arose and this was settled on his younger son, Kim Jong Un.

Kim Jong Il died on 11 December 2011, and Kim Jong Un was installed as the new leader 100 days after his father's death. He immediately became a cult figure and dismissed most existing ministers. His uncle, Jang Song Thaek, previously a key figure, was executed. His brother, Kim Jong Chol, was assassinated abroad.

Kim Jong Un promoted the market and living standards. In addition, he pushed the development of nuclear weapons in an attempt to safeguard the country. North Korea is still technically at war with the United States and there is constant concern about its survival. It therefore maintains the fifth largest army in the world, which costs 25% of GDP, plus nuclear arms. North Korea was pressed to follow Libya's example and give up nuclear weapons, but Gaddafi's fall was an object lesson in what could ensue.

In October 2006, North Korea carried out its first underground nuclear tests. In February 2007 it agreed to close its main nuclear reactor, but a new alarm was sounded in May 2009. In 2012, Pyongyang ended nuclear experiments in return for food aid.

A nuclear 'deterrent' is, however, regarded as central to North Korea's defence and can only be bargained away in return for US concessions. A window of opportunity came with President Trump's initial acceptance of Kim Jong Un's offer in March 2018 for an early summit. But US counter measures and joint military exercises in the south have not been cancelled, despite an improvement in relations between North and South.

The game is still not played out and Glyn Ford will, no doubt, be continuing to study it and to talk to North Korea. This book is an excellent study of an unattractive regime that is not well understood in the West. Glyn Ford has made himself an authority on the character of the Democratic Republic of North Korea, and anyone wishing to be aware of the history, politics and economics of this remote country should read *Talking to North Korea*.

The Life of Riley

Sylvia Riley, *Winter at the Bookshop: Politics and Poverty: St Ann's in the 1960s*, Five Leaves Publications, 2019, 148 pages, paperback ISBN 9781910170663, £7.99

Carol Lake, *Rosehill: portraits from a midlands city*, Bloomsbury, 1989, 180 pages, hardback ISBN 9780747503019, £12.95

They are one and the same. As Raymond Chandler and P. G. Wodehouse at Dulwich, Sylvia and I just missed each other at 4 Dane Street, St Ann's, Nottingham. She arrived in 1963; I emigrated in late 1962.

Carol Lake also recalled the 1960s in her *Switchboard Operators* (1994), autobiographic fictions based on her days working for the General Post Office (GPO) in Derby; *Winter...* provides the plain factual narrative. This spawned the popular television 'sit-com' *Hello Girls* — YouTube preserves episodes. Adapted by Ruth Carter, the main character is Sylvia Sands, a self-proclaimed Marxist distributing leftist literature in her workplace. Two other novels: *Wendy and her Year of Wonders* (2008), a saga of farming in 1930s Yorkshire (shades of *All Creatures Great and Small*); *Those Summers at Moon Farm* (2009), passion and politics in rural East Anglia.

Rob M in *Red Mole* praises as 'fantastic' Sylvia Riley's original, shorter St Ann's memoir, from 2016, and welcomes the expanded 2019 book; the Red Mole Rising website provides a pdf of the 2016 text. Regarding the much expanded book under review, Gaby Rubin in *Weekly Worker* (online), whilst calling it 'warm-hearted and amusing, easy and great fun to read,' criticises the narrative as frequently disjointed, characters vaguely drawn, and light on major political issues. There is some truth to this. Many anecdotes ramble — being of the same vintage, I'm sure I do, too — plus much extraneous detail, not specially relevant albeit amusingly instructive in itself, and it is hard to segregate and focus the numerous habitués of 4 Dane Street (long-since demolished), and (alas) no surviving photograph — an Index would have been very useful.

As to the politics, the original memoir was intended as a 90th birthday tribute to Pat Jordan, who was born in the 1920s and died in 2001. The expanded book colourfully depicts the shop's primitive squalor (I can confirm the accuracy) in which he lived and worked. Whilst (rightly) affectionate, Sylvia is no hagiographer, not omitting Pat's many eccentric foibles and occasional unfair and unpleasant tantrums. His 'spectacular fall from grace' is not explained here.

Pat's long, unstinting service to his factional and ideological causes, perhaps contributing to his devastating stroke, is overwhelmed by the picture of a bookshop that evokes (say) Sillitoe and Wesker. For a longer story, read Steve Cohen's online tribute to Pat. Riley quotes the 1968 *Daily Mail* comment about Pat as 'the most dangerous man in Britain'.

Sylvia is not indifferent to politics. One chapter surveys Trotskyist sectarian warfare, including the Glaswegian Selbyites, omitted from most other memoirs, dubbed 'obscure', a trifle unfairly — see Harry Selby's detailed online Manifesto. Played down are Gerry Healy's 'Club' and Socialist Labour League (SLL), by whom Pat was emphatically not impressed. Healy's Nottingham Gauleiters, Robert and Mickie Shaw, were not seen in the shop. Whenever in St. Ann's, Robert would hiss 'this is Pabloite territory.'

Sylvia has things to say about Pablo (Michel Raptis), the 'nut-case' Posada, and harks back in time to the Levellers' famous 1647 Putney Debates, effectively re-created in one of Mat Coward's leftist short stories. Other Left luminaries include Tariq Ali ('wonderful guy' — Pat) and Tony Cliff, surprisingly featuring as a pop-music lover and pioneer house-husband. She also gives long overdue praise to the (in other memoirs) neglected Nottingham Leftist journalist teacher Peter Price, whom I well remember, described by a friend as 'the Uncle of the World'.

Sylvia quotes Pat's fulminations against 'that bitch Alice Bacon and Bessie bloody Braddock'. Contrariwise, most Leftists would classify her warm praises of Harold Wilson as a major eccentricity.

As Sylvia says, so many Trots were trotting around Nottingham that the city was nicknamed 'Trottingham'. George Thayer's *The British Political Fringe* (1965) gives a detailed, dispassionate outsider account, including special mention of Pat, Ken Coates, and the Bookshop.

To paraphrase Trotsky, this Permanent Revaluation is best summed up in the Socialist Summer Camps' chorus (Sylvia is eloquent on the primitive chaos of these Kessingland gatherings, which I wryly recall):

Four and Twenty Trotskyists
 Went to Inverness
 When the faction fight was over
 There were four-and-twenty less.
 Singing, 'I'll split if you split
 If we split at all —
 We'll form the majority faction
 Or don't join us at all.'

Winter at the Bookshop kicks off with a semi-fiction (praised and published by influential literary critic Karl Miller), ‘Trotsky’s Other Son’. Pat gave Sylvia such a rigmarole about the other son’s circus life with a bareback rider called Spangles that she doubted his existence, finding no other evidence. Wrongly. Sergei Sedov *did* exist, *did* work in a circus; seems (there is doubt) to have been purged in 1937. ‘Spangles’ could be Pat’s embroidering, albeit there was a famously huge horse of this name in America (1871).

Ken Coates naturally figures. Sylvia lauds his devotion to workers’ control, boundless political energy, organisational skills, and socialist omniscience, showing his rebarbative side in the big bust-up with Pat that concludes *Winter in the Bookshop*. The ‘opening move’ in the split in the International Group, according to Sylvia, was when Ken collected from the shop all copies of the *International Socialist Journal*, edited by Lelio Basso in Milan, for which Ken was UK contact and editorial board member since the journal’s inception in January 1964. Additionally, Ken’s standard comment on society, ‘it’s not fairation’, is explained as miners’ slang. Actually, writers in *Notes & Queries* (v.6, November 1880, p.413) variously attribute it to Lancashire ‘vulgarity’, Essex, or Oswestry (Shropshire); it is also listed in dialect-slang dictionaries, and may derive from ‘fair ration’. Sylvia says Ken left the Communist Party over Hungary — he had in fact fallen out with the Party years earlier over Yugoslavia and its line on Tito and the show trials of Slansky and others. If, as I, you can’t get enough of Ken Coates, his University of Nottingham Special Collections archive currently runs to 610 boxes.

Not that much in *Winter at the Bookshop* about John Daniels senior, but he does have the funniest line. Watching a neighbour’s large brood of children playing on their house roof, John observed ‘what a very Malthusian way of dealing with their over-production’.

Of the numerous other *dramatis personae*, I single out two, neither household names, but with whom I was close. Granville Stone, who led two strikes at Calverton Colliery, was sacked from a factory for union activity; with myself member of, and expelled from, Healy’s SLL, then migrating to the single-digit-membership Workers’ League. The other was Patricia Fryd, active in Nottingham University’s ‘SOC-SOC’, noted for her teeming tresses, buskins, and black cigarettes, lifelong member of the International Marxist Group (successor, in 1968, to the International Group). I much regret missing the gold lamé cocktail dress with freesias corsage sported at her wedding.

This is partly Sylvia’s own memoir, with details of her many jobs, her mental health, street demos, the St. Ann’s ‘race riot’ (quotation marks

hers), and aestivation in St. Ann's, à la Lovin' Spoonful's 'Summer in the City', the stress on pub crawls and boisterous football fans (Forest, not County). She has a charming story about Bertrand Russell. Every few months, she had to send him ('our precious jewel') a box of some 60 detective stories. Pat explained this addiction: 'he's a mathematician, and he wants a problem to solve'.

Winter in the Bookshop has its flaws. Overall, though, I happily endorse the eulogies of *Red Mole* and *Weekly Worker*. Can't do better than quote her epigraphic dedication:

'For all those who shared the Bookshop days, and for the wonderful young people now who are struggling for a better world.'

Rosehill won the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1989, described as 'a haunting picture of the contemporary British inner city'. Carol was in good company. Other winners include Pat Barker, Beryl Bainbridge, J. G. Ballard, Eva Figes, Michael Moorcock. Her book should be seen within the rich vein of East Midlands writing, on which see my survey in *Spokesman* 132 (2016) and Rowena Edlin-White's *Exploring Nottinghamshire Writers* (Five Leaves Publications, with Ross Bradshaw's essay). Of those I've read, Nicola Monaghan's Broxtowe-based *The Killing Jar* (2006) is the bleakest.

However, although it has a Redhill and an Arboretum, Nottingham isn't the city in *Rosehill*. References to Henry Royce's statue (p.1), local philanthropist Joseph Strutt (p. 126) and local train trip to Matlock (p. 147) establish Derby (where she lives) as setting.

There were three enthusiastic reviewers: Susannah Clapp, *London Review of Books*, July 6; T. Clyde, *Times Literary Review*, July 21-27; Mike Parker, *New Statesman*, May 26 — all 1989, all online. There was also a meticulously detailed analysis of content, ideology, and personality by Michael Keith, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (2004), 129-135.

Carol herself sketched out *Rosehill's* background in a 1985 *London Review of Books* Diary, invited by editor Karl Miller who published therein her opening story 'Signing On'. 'The Sisters' was first published in the *New Statesman*. There's also an online sale advertisement for author-signed pages of the original typescript which gives the later-changed people's real names.

In all, thirteen (symbolic?) stories. According to the book, all but two set in 1985-86. There are various referential pointers to the chronology: Space Shuttle Challenger disaster; General Election (1983 or 1987?); Indira Ghandi's assassination; Libyan Bombings; Miners' Strike; Riots

(Brixton/Handsworth/Tottenham); Royal Wedding (1981 Diana? 1986 Fergie?); Russian radiation leak.

There is a deal of repetition, excusable, indeed unavoidable, in a series of linked stories. The style is stripped down, workmanlike, demotic in tone though ('F Word' apart) not much coprolalia. Most of it is written in the Historic Present, too much so for my taste though it was a common classical device and suits the 'urgency' praised by other reviewers. Occasional stabs at more elevated tone flop. I find no obvious meaning in 'trees craze black lines' (p. 70), whilst 'still sea of black lino' (p. 43) recalls Alan Sillitoe's bizarre definition of 'bed' as 'brass-bound raft of sleep', plus her 'chthonic visitant' with its Lawrentian echo.

Still, there are moments of effective poignancy such as a Pakistani's reflections on the loneliness of English life and narrator's 'we all retreat into our private worlds,' undermining the over-arching theme of Community. Most touching (p. 94) is the description of jobless, hopeless Paula as 'starting to learn, step by step, how to fail'. Though relentlessly pitched at street level, the narrator can quote Chaucer, has read Orwell on Spain, and Gaskell's *Cranford*, as well as Havelock Ellis on female sexual pleasure, also listening to Beethoven's Fifth. 'Sometimes too literate,' sniffs Clapp with misplaced snobbery. Why shouldn't such an individual, who aspires to 'A Levels' and has 24 overdue library books, display a character thus enriched? I hear Richard Hoggart's bones rattling ...

In terms of the stories themselves, Carol glows brightest in her shortest and strangest one ('The Day of Judgement'), a parable about the indifference with which people accept an impending apocalyptic flood and mysterious Ark. Black irony is Carol's forte. In the longest tale ('Hawa'), the eponymous Somali girl, after describing the horrors of her childhood genital mutilation, proceeds to defend as their cultural tradition. The simplistic notion that racism is just black-white is exploded by Somali disgust at a daughter with a Jamaican boyfriend. There's a racist who would defend a child of any colour against violence. Even the local police, who take a predictable hammering for ignoring burglaries and the like, are praised for their pleasant demeanour, whilst an anti-demolition protest was 'the only meeting I've been to where the audience was out-lefted by the police'.

It was, I think, first said of Disraeli's early novels that all fiction is autobiography, a sentiment echoed by (amongst others) crime novelist P. D. James. This applies with a vengeance here. The narrator is called Carol. Her opening story, 'Signing On', a connecting theme to the last one ('Round and About') describes her mixed scorn and pity for a Trotskyist paper-seller ignored by the locals (I can identify with that!), recalling her

own previous membership of such a group, adding the all-too-familiar gloss, ‘our lot couldn’t stick his lot’.

This is the only overt mention of politics. No anti-Tory tirades, no endorsement of Labour or any other party. Surprising? After all, this was the 1980s — a decade of unemployment and the dole, inner-city riots, racist and other thuggish beatings-up, football hooligans, the miners’ strike, The Age of Thatcher. About whom not one word is said. Rather, Carol makes her political points through urban backgrounds, characterisations, and dialogue.

Two reviewers’ reactions are worth quoting. First, Parker (*New Statesman*): ‘I can give it no higher praise than to say that, if she could read it, and could *understand* it, Mrs Thatcher would hate it.’ Second, Clyde (*TLS*): ‘Secretly we would rather she ranted, pathetically, and with suitable political questions about what she has seen. But this would still leave it comfortably separate from all of it.’

As Mrs Thatcher said at the 1987 Election, ‘I want to go on and on’. So do I. But, I shall merely say that after reading these two books, I am hotfooting it to her others.

*Who is Silvia? what is she,
that all the swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she
(Shakespeare, Two Gentlemen of Verona)*

Barry Baldwin

Café Commune

Mike Reid, *Mix Café — A Memoir of Laurieston Hall, 1972-77*, McConnell & Co, 2019, 256 pages, paperback ISBN 9781527237605, £12.99

Perhaps better titles would have been ‘Life on a Commune’ or ‘How I Helped Start a Commune and Then Live On It’ because that is what this excellent book is all about. The author was one of the generation born during or shortly after the Second World War. Their parents and grandparents understandably wanted a quiet life, even a dull one. Two world wars are quite enough excitement for anyone. Their children didn’t agree; they wanted action but without Belsen or storming up beaches under machine-gun fire or being blitzed. And for the great majority, the

Korean War, the Mau Mau, EOKA in Cyprus, Aden, Malaya were mostly out of sight and out of mind. So, they got hold of the Blues and turned it into Rock 'n' Roll. The Roaring 20s were going to be nothing on the Swinging 60s, and earlier generations' 'Wine, Women and Song' was turned into 'Drugs, Sex and Rock 'n' Roll' and 'Tune in, Turn On and Drop Out'. The music was just about everywhere, the drugs, apart from alcohol, much less so, and as for dropping out, most people continued to lead their normal lives of quiet desperation.

The kids, especially the middle class ones, were spoiled of course — free health care, free grammar schools, expensive public schools, free university education for a tiny minority, and a freedom to roam that kids today can only dream about. The more thoughtful ones, like their parents, wanted to do their bit and, there being no gap year in those days, went off to foreign lands to do good with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) or the United Nations Association (UNA), or stayed at home with Community Service Volunteers (CSV). As is always the case, the volunteers had much more good done to them than they could ever hope to do themselves. They had a deep and lasting experience and learned something about how the other two-thirds lived. There seemed to be quite a lot of social injustice about. Whatever Jimmy Porter had said in *Look Back in Anger* about there being no causes left was not quite true. There was Ban the Bomb, CND and Greenham Common. And even those who didn't join up and go abroad, young professionals who were not content with suburban life and ritual began to wonder, 'is this really what it is all about?'

Then came the Australian invasion: people like Richard Neville and Germaine Greer arrived. The former started *Oz*, a magazine that was political and satirical and a lot more fun to read than the turgid prose of Commie newsheets (and was quickly prosecuted for obscenity), while the latter firmly implanted 'Women's Lib' on the public consciousness with her book *The Female Eunuch*.

London's Carnaby Street was pathetic but a tougher counter culture drifted over from the USA — the growing movement against the Vietnam War; open black rebellion as members of the Black Panthers were gunned down or imprisoned. Yippies said you needed more than love, acid trips and flowers in your hair were not enough, and anarchic rebellion was demanded: no politics without poetry and no poetry without politics. There could be no political change without personal change. An insane society produced mad people who perpetuated a mad society and this vicious circle had to be broken. Political activists of all radical colours actually forgot their differences for a sunny weekend and worked together, which is why such different figures as Abbie Hoffman, Dave Dellinger, Rennie

Davis and Tom Hayden along with others including Afro-American, Bobby Seale, chained and gagged in court, were charged with conspiracy, accused of causing what had been a police riot in Chicago. Away from the city, communes were springing up all across the country as well as in town.

So it was that a small group of young, well educated, well paid professionals decided to take a stand and break away and break out. They were London based but by selling their houses they raised the funds to buy an old Victorian mansion of 65 rooms that had latterly been a hospital for infectious diseases and then an old people's home in Galloway, 25 miles west of Dumfries. Others joined later, as I did for two years, three or four years after it was started. The 'romantic' country commune quickly became a very intense, not to say 'tense' place to be as reality struck home. Indeed, yet another title could have been given to this book, taken from Allen Ginsberg's poem 'Howl'. It is a wailing cry of grief, anger, despair and disillusion, as well as a love call to the author's wife, the mother of his two small children as their relationship falls apart. Mike Reid describes well the freezing house during winter, the rages, tantrums, tears, sulks and resentments that flooded through this cold and draughty building and this unhappy band of brothers and sisters. Nobody had quite realised how contaminated the inmates had been by the very society they were rejecting; the Insane Society followed them all the way to the old hospital for infectious diseases. Money, the root of all evil and the curse of society; yet the group was obsessed by it. There was a communal kitty so was it right or fair that X had 3 pints down at the local pub while Y had only one? When could you take the battered old car and when should you hitch?

Hierarchy had been abolished but there was a pecking order. The nuclear family was dismissed, a suffocating bourgeois trap so 'couple' became a dirty word. Love was free but came at a terrible price, and what if you liked or loved someone enough you wanted to spend more time with that person than with anyone else?

In one of the interminable meetings, A would launch into B, fiercely and aggressively attacking them for having left the garden tools and implements outside all night without having cleaned them. This meant more expense as the tools would deteriorate quicker; the guilty brother or sister was not being a good communitard! Of course, the outraged complainer could not have given a shit about the garden implements. This was a coded way of saying, 'you are sleeping with my lover. I am hurt, upset, angry, crying, broken hearted and I would like to break your neck'. But you couldn't say it — jealousy was bourgeois. You had failed as a liberated, freedom-loving New Man or Woman.

Competition was a plague of modern society and it followed into this

‘alternative’ world as everybody strove to be the greatest, right-on communitarian, laying on guilt and putting everyone else down to push yourself up. Look at me! The greatest communitarian in the world! And work? We had come to escape the ‘work ethic’ but never did anyone work so hard in their lives. The demands were endless and people were so exhausted they didn’t have either time or energy for the finer things of life.

It wasn’t all bad news of course. The countryside was out of this world, the big house within easy reach of lochs, rivers and burns and the wild Galloway Hills where ‘they’ wanted to bury nuclear waste (it wasn’t — the only time I have been involved in a political campaign that was successful, unless you count CAMRA). The nuclear-contaminated (from Sellafield/Windscale) sea was near at hand, and when the weather was good, sometimes even when it was ‘bad’, it was paradise. Words of love were whispered and many a cosy joint was shared around a wood fire in someone’s room at the end of the day. There were days on the beaches, sleeping in bothies in the hills, skinny-dipping in the loch and dancing. From the outside it all looked marvellous — these guys were really leading the revolution, they were FREE, lived their own lives and were beholden to no one.

Over the years, thousands passed through this commune and most were deeply touched, moved and inspired by it. They came in groups, sometimes more than a 100, sometimes just small numbers. This was one of the ways the commune had an income. It was a kind of alternative conference centre, sometimes organized by the inmates themselves, sometimes just cooking and catering for a group that had rented the place for a week or sometimes the visitors just rented the place and did everything themselves. There were Men’s Weeks, Women’s Weeks, Gay Weeks, Building and Maintenance Weeks, Meditation Weeks, Communes’ Network Weeks (there was much linking with other communes), Delinquent Children Weeks, Gardening Weeks — you name it and there was a week for it.

And when all the visitors had gone, there was some relief that there was once again peace and quiet. But everyone was thrown back on each other again and the depressions and bad tempers returned, coupled with sadness at the loss of a new lover encountered over the summer who had gone home faraway. The inmates, of course, had their coping tactics and strategies well honed by this time. Some worked outside the commune and pooled the income. For instance, I worked in the Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary Accident and Emergency Department for my first year there. This not only got me out of the place but helped me keep a sense of proportion. If I came back and found someone bitching about the garden

tools left out all night, I was just grateful that another day had passed and I hadn't had a heart attack, been burned, been smashed up in an accident, been told I had cancer, or wept over a dead child. Then there was always 'Drugs, Sex and Rock 'n' Roll' for escape. But it wasn't a big drug scene and the mention of two acid trips in the book surprised me. It was basically marijuana, alcohol and the magic mushrooms that grew on Galloway hillsides, all quite innocent really. Other escapes were self-exile to your own room or further away, illness, or in my case, having friends in the two cottages on the land, especially an artist and teacher and wife and two children, which became a refuge from the 'craziness up at the Hall'.

All this sounds very 'heavy' and indeed it was heavy but *Mix Café* isn't. It is a story well told and often very funny. The author has a sharp wit that runs throughout the book. I think I would take issue with him only over three things: he discusses the relationship of the inmates with the locals and perhaps they were better than I remember or experienced them, but I found, on the whole, the communards were patronising and condescending. We were the 'Enlightened Ones', the locals were considered a bit thick and ignorant. I remember, for instance, one meeting when a local farmer had asked for some help with the haymaking or something. He had done us a very good turn with his tractor on several occasions and it was suggested we should offer our services. But, no, on this occasion it wasn't convenient for some reason. 'But we owe him', someone had said. Quick as a flash, back came the reply, 'just because he helped us doesn't mean we have to help him'. Spoiled, you see, and so superior, but we all had this slight messianic complex. We, after all, were a Shining Light leading the world out of Darkness and the same rules did not apply to the Enlightened Ones.

Nor was I as enthusiastic as the author about the women's movement at the Hall. I agreed with everything about it but found it oppressive. I am a guy, of course, so what else do you expect? I felt it got to the stage when it was impossible to criticise a woman. Woman = Good, Man = Bad. I said to one of the sisters once, 'criticising a woman here is like criticising Israel's policy towards the Palestinians but instead of being called anti-Semitic you are automatically an MCP'. And, once entering a room that was a common space and no notice outside, I interrupted a women's meeting and met a volume of abuse. Nothing unusual about that, of course, just one of the joys of being a communard and creating a new world. After half a million years of male domination who can blame the sisters for wanting a bit of payback time?

The third issue is when the author discusses child care. It was supposed to be shared, *communal*, by everyone, with or without children. There were

a lot of kids about and, with so many adults, inevitably they got looked after by those who were not necessarily their parents from time to time, but it never really happened. I have memories of kids howling and crying round the clock and most (as far as I know but my knowledge is very sketchy) couldn't wait to get out when they were old enough. They usually ended up making conventional partnerships. I remember attending the wedding of one communard child looking very beautiful in her long white bridal gown. I don't remember if the groom wore a morning suit but it was that kind of wedding and very enjoyable too. Most of their parents left too, eventually, often with their last and latest lover and, 30-40 years down the road, are still together like old married couples. Some, however, stayed on and Laurieston Hall Community continues, 'no longer communal but closer to a co-housing situation'.

Such social experiments have been described as frivolous, not really political, the self-indulgence of privileged middle class professionals. It was 'political' alright, indeed a brave attempt to take the bull by the horns to try and change society. Was it a success? It touched and educated a lot of people: what did you do to try and revolutionise society? How many attempts, dear reader, became success stories on the Left? For the Eric Hobsbawns, Christopher Hills and E.P. Thompsons of the future, Laurieston Hall will, like the Diggers in more revolutionary times than ours, provide a remarkable and interesting historical footnote.

Nigel Potter

We're not rats, we're human beings

W W J Knox and A McKinlay, *Jimmy Reid: A Clyde-Built Man* Liverpool University Press, 2019, 272 pages, paperback ISBN 9781789620849, £24.95

Jimmy Reid will forever be remembered for his part in the work-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders. That action not only saved the shipyards from closure, but it might also be credited with sparking a wave of occupations by workers fighting closures and redundancies, as well as the general escalation of trade disputes in the 1970s and 1980s. The UCS work-in is therefore central to this biography, but the work also gains strength in its consideration of Reid's earlier and later life in the making and trajectory of his politics. It is the critical reflection in this account of his life, by two capable historians, that distinguishes this biography from Reid's own

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autobiographical sketch, in *Reflections of a Clyde-built Man* (1976) and from *Jimmy Reid: A Scottish Political Journey* by journalist Kenny MacAskill. Knox and McKinley place Reid's life in the broader political context and ponder his reaction to it, spanning the Cold War, the Heath and Wilson governments of the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of Thatcherism, Blair and New Labour and, not least, the rise of the Scottish National Party.

While the title promotes a 'Clyde-built man', reflecting Reid's autobiography, this book could easily be called 'The making of a working-class hero', although with the addition of a question mark. It traces Reid's career beyond UCS, his attempts at election to Parliament, first as a candidate for the Communist Party of Great Britain and, soon after, as a Labour Party candidate, and to his career in journalism. Of importance in this account is not just Reid's relation to the work-in, and his role in creating something of a mythology around it, but also his relation with the Communist Party (CPGB) as its most prominent member, notwithstanding the rather ambivalent relationship of the UCS stewards to the CPGB during the work-in. Significant for broader political changes is the consideration of Reid's later political shift to the Scottish National Party (SNP).

Born in Glasgow in the 1930s, Reid's first employment was as a clerk for a Glasgow stockbroker. He later served an apprenticeship as a fitter in the shipbuilding and, by 1952, was making a name within trade unionism and politics as one of the leaders of an engineering apprentices' strike. By then he was a member of CPGB, which boasted a high membership in the AEU, the engineering union, to which Reid belonged. Recognised by the CPGB hierarchy, he left the shipyards for appointment as a full time Party official. This period is the haziest, often drawing on autobiographies of other CPGB members on life in the Party without much detail about Reid's own work and experience. The tight personal relationships portrayed in these accounts are used, in part, to explain what can be seen as Reid's initial political inertia.

Jimmy Reid: A Clyde-Built Man gives some hints about how, having only recently returned to the shipyards after a long period working full time for the CPGB, not only did Reid have such prominence in the UCS shop stewards committee but also how they avoided the work-in being presented as a Party initiative. Limited pay from the Party, with the cost of a growing family, led to Reid's return to shipbuilding in the late 1960s. This, the authors suggest, was possibly initiated by Jimmy Airlie, a CPGB member and union convenor at the Fairfield yard, probably with the expectation that Reid would himself quickly become a steward and possibly a convenor.

When the Heath Government withdrew support for UCS, and the yards went into receivership in summer 1971, it was Reid who announced the decision of the joint shop stewards' committee to stage the work-in. Any workers made redundant by the receiver and who continued to attend for work would be paid by the stewards. This wasn't then an exercise in workers' control or self-management, with the running of the yards remaining in the hands of the receiver.

Reid along with Airlie became recognised as the most charismatic leaders of the work-in, and they were the ones who largely constructed some mythology about UCS. 'So astute and convincing were Airlie and Reid', argue Knox and McKinley, 'that they were able ... to create a compelling, uplifting, but fictional, narrative of the work-in' (p109). The authors are informative about some of the mystique and unanswered questions concerning the work-in. They clearly state that, while the UCS shop stewards' committee was adept at publicity for their campaign of resistance, it was the receiver who maintained control of work at the yards. While not addressed directly, it certainly becomes clear how Reid, not long returned to his tools at the yard, rose so quickly to union position, the shop steward committee and prominence during the work-in. Although CPGB membership was strong amongst the shop stewards, 'the agenda was defined by events, not by any party line. Decisions were pragmatic, rather than ideological' (p103-4). The Party and Bert Ramelson, its industrial organiser, were kept at a distance during the work-in. It's suggested that Ramelson and the CPGB were wary of too close an association with the work-in in case it proved a failure.

Reid and the stewards can be credited with initiating collective action which drew on the existing militancy of the shipyard workers, despite this very militancy having been built around demarcation and division between the very trades involved:

'platers and burners fought with each other to control flame cutting machinery. Welders restricted entry to the trade and refused to allow unemployed workers of other shipbuilding trades to operate welding equipment. Boilermakers used apprenticeship and separate agreements covering their terms of employment to maintain their differentials with other trades. Workplace solidarity was a concept barely understood among shipbuilding workers.' (p. 103)

Reid's growing public recognition was reflected in his election as Rector of the University of Glasgow by its students, in 1972. At his inauguration he gave the address on alienation, that 'the rat race was for rats', which

was printed in *The New York Times*, and claimed by some to be the greatest speech since the Gettysburg Address (see *Spokesman* 110). At the same time Reid was increasingly becoming a media personality. However, this did not enhance his electoral profile much — while elected to Clydebank City Council, he failed as a CPGB candidate in the 1974 general election. Knox and McKinlay reflect on the electoral defeat, and to what extent such defeats were the foundation for Reid's subsequent political shifts.

Reid remained in the CPGB during the major exodus in 1956 over the Stalin revelations and the invasion of Hungary. He was also tipped as a possible future General Secretary. Why did Reid leave the Party in the 1970s? While the authors indicate a subsequent revival in the CPGB, this represented a shift in membership from manual workers to students. However, typical of their authorship, they do not attempt to read Reid's mind, despite his own accounts, but draw as well from their own extensive interviews. Thus,

'we have two competing narratives of the events and motives behind Reid's resignation. (His) version is one in which thoughts of resignation gestate over a fairly long period of time, but beginning roughly in 1967. From that point onwards, he undergoes a daily process of questioning his conscience and beliefs, eventually reaching the conclusion that what he had held to be self-evidently true was now a fiction: indeed, a delusion, which denied the realities of the undemocratic nature of the Soviet Union and the CPGB itself. Membership of, and commitment to, the Party was only made possible through the twin ties of loyalty to family and comrades. The other narrative depicts him as an opportunist in thrall to the sins of vanity and venality. Finding the truth among partisan and polarised positions is an almost hopeless task for the historian' (p166-7).

At the 1979 general election, after only months in the Labour Party, Reid stood as Labour candidate for Dundee East, losing to the SNP. Knox and McKinlay present interesting argument around Reid's subsequent political course, having been critical of the Labour Party as a CPGB candidate, as a member he gravitated towards the Tribune/Broad Left, latterly forging a friendship with Neil Kinnock, one of many people interviewed for this biography.

Another source of Reid's voice, useful to the authors in evaluating his views, emerged in the 1980s with his move into journalism. Some prominence is given to Reid's clash with Arthur Scargill, the decade's other 'working class hero', over the miners' strike. According to Knox and

McKinley, this rift with Scargill, and Reid's fierce criticism of the strike, is a window to Reid's political perspective. While couched in Marxist class analysis, they see Reid's politics revolving around individual actors as 'psychodrama', hence the miners' strike

'was the battle of wills between Arthur Scargill and his brand of revolutionary socialism versus Margaret Thatcher, the iron lady, the high priestess of neo-liberalism. Thus, it was a personal as much as an ideological struggle. This meant that community and the role of women became mere footnotes in Reid's analysis' (p203).

Reid's own attitudes seem to increasingly represent those of a popular tabloid journalist in columns in the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Record*, and briefly in the Scottish editions of *The Sun*, critical of Labour's 'loony left' and attacking its 'middle class London based intellectuals'. These led to rifts with Neil Kinnock, with whom he had shared views on the miners' strike, as well as finally with Jimmie Airlie, his comrade at UCS and in the CPGB.

Of most immediate significance is perhaps the consideration of Reid's move from Labour to the Scottish National Party towards the end of his life. To some extent this might be read as microcosm of the shift in Scottish politics more generally, as the Labour vote was lost to the benefit of the SNP.

Jimmy Reid: A Clyde-Built Man addresses many of the enigmas in this complex life. Reid was an important actor in one of the most historic events in recent working-class history, which may very well not have occurred without his involvement. His political life spanned the turbulence of post-war politics, and there is some insight into Reid's thoughts and actions as he navigated politics and the labour movement through the second half of the 20th century. This biography is not just a welcome examination and reflection on the life of Jimmy Reid, but also on the UCS work-in as well as Scottish and UK politics of the period. Maybe it does not have all the answers, but it asks many of the important questions.

Alan Tuckman

Wilderness crimes

Adania Shibli, *Minor Detail*, translated by Elizabeth Jaquette, Fitzcarraldo Editions 2020, 120 pages, ISBN 9781913097172, £10.99

In her introduction to ‘A Journey of Ideas Across’ (2013), a symposium on the legacy of Edward Said, Adania Shibli invokes a range of ideas that seem, in hindsight, to have played a considerable part in the twelve-year gestation of *Minor Detail*, or at least to have been uncannily prescient. Chief among these perhaps is *al-muthanna*, a term drawn from Arabic grammar which addresses, and seeks to overcome, the ‘binary, oppositional relations in language systems’ and replace them with a negotiated Otherness. Shibli cites Said on Leonardo da Vinci:

‘Metaphorically speaking, an abyss is the equivalent of what is presented to us as immutable, definitive, impossible to go beyond. No matter how deep and problematic the scene that presented itself to him, Leonardo always had the capacity to think of some alternative to it, some way of solving the problem, some gift for not passively accepting what was given to him, as if the scene that Leonardo imagined could always be envisioned in a different, and perhaps more hopeful way.’

Two discourses, all but irreconcilable in their differences, and the real, historical abyss that separates them: this, as Shibli has said (*Literary Hub* online interview, June 2020) was the starting premise for *Minor Detail*. Her ‘linguistic anxiety’ takes in, on the one hand, the triumphalist linear narrative of ‘exclusivist settler colonialism’ (Eqbal Ahmad) that stretches all the way back to Herzl and Balfour and forwards to Netanyahu and is immediately reactivated, like plugging into a socket, on the second page of the novel by the mission statement of the Israeli officer (her first protagonist and, in effect, an ideological cipher, unnamed, devoid of biography, implacable) tasking his men to ‘comb the southwest part of the Negev and cleanse it of any remaining Arabs’. Opposed to this, in the sense ultimately of a galvanised resistance, female and Palestinian, the novel erupts half-way into a second narrative of the most wondrous, unapologetic subjectivity where before there seemed to be virtually none: timid and hesitant at first in the context half a century later of ‘what happens daily in a place [Ramallah, and by extension all the Territories] dominated by the roar of occupation and ceaseless killing’ – Shibli calls it ‘falling’, ‘stumbling’,

‘continually collapsing’ – the new voice quickly develops a freewheeling momentum within the fractured environment that wants to suffocate it that’s positively Joycean, Protean, and transgressive both imaginatively and politically. In the earlier fictions *Touch* and *We Are All Equally Far from Love* the extensive cast of girls and women seem so tethered to the depredations of an abusive patriarchy, isolated and traumatised (‘my whole life is shrinking, on its way to disappearance,’ one character avows) the wider context of the surveillance state and its violent incursions barely registers – a little girl overhears fragments from a television report on the massacres in Sabra and Shatila; a disaffected teenager works for the censorship in her local post office and rapidly acquires a ‘secret service mentality’; a woman briefly distracted by the flags on a municipal building becomes conscious she ‘shouldn’t loiter’, but these are rare instances of anything approaching a social consciousness and their implications are never pursued. *Minor Detail* registers the general malaise in a single arresting image – ‘the plants simply don’t resist. They just surrender to the fact of their fragility, that the wind can do what it wishes with them, fooling around with their leaves, passing between their branches, penetrating their boughs’ – before launching its female Quixote on her perilous journey across the dehumanised landscape that was once Palestine with barely a backward glance.

Her deepening, almost visceral horror as she passes between the militarised zones assaulted by the ‘smell of freshly poured bitumen’ is matched by the discomfiture of the Israeli soldiers faced, at the beginning of the novel, with the Negev’s unrelenting physical harshness, although immediately prior to the *Nakba* and the events detailed in the narrative the region had been home to 90,000 Bedouin ‘divided between 96 tribes, already in the process of establishing a land-ownership system, grazing rights and water access’(Ilan Pappé). The ‘mirage’ on which they train their binoculars in a vain attempt to police the ‘faint winding border’ between the newly declared State of Israel and its Egyptian neighbour mocks their supremacist entitlement just as the sand obliterates the ‘little indentations made on its surface by the soldiers’ feet’. Mahmoud Darwish, in the early poem ‘A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies’ (1967), drew fire for his willingness to enter imaginatively into the dilemma of the occupier of a terrain so irredeemably alien: ‘Homeland for him, he tells me, *is to drink my mother’s coffee, to return / at nightfall. / And the land? I don’t know the land, he said. / I don’t feel it in my flesh and blood, as they say in the poems. / Suddenly I saw the land as one sees a grocery store, a street, newspapers*’.

Shibli grants us no such access, in an omniscient perspective that deals

only in externalities as if the platoon and, especially, their lethally methodical commander were not thinking beings at all, just machines consisting of physical drives and reactions and schooled in ethnic hatred: one thinks of Arendt and the ‘Banality of Evil’. The meaningless rites of reconnaissance, combat training and drilling carried out on this remote site of entrapment and impassive featurelessness are much like those in Buzzati’s *The Tartar Steppe* (‘Like the motion of a pendulum they marked off the passage of time without breaking the enchantment of the immense silence’) except the latter form the backdrop to a sustained, compassionate meditation on the human condition (‘Within he was a whirl of confused fears and foolish desires’). Shibli’s sympathies, understandably, lie emphatically elsewhere than with a callous invasion force committed to turning the desert, through acts of slaughter, into a ‘flourishing, civilized region [and] thriving centre of learning, culture and development’ – witness the richness and complexity of characterisation reserved, later in the text, only for her female. Here atrocity reigns, gang rape and murder, including scenes of the cleaning and sterilising with petrol of a naked Bedouin woman, of hair shaving and burning that recall another, and in August 1949 very recent Holocaust. But a door has also been flung open, at the end of the first section, for the reclamation of this particular victim’s story by her Palestinian compatriot, in a deft manoeuvre involving some extraordinary fabulatory magic.

The minor detail that inspires an unassuming, fearful young office worker armed only with a set of, chiefly, the coloniser’s maps, a borrowed ID and a ‘belief in the uniqueness of the self’ to brave the checkpoints and settlements criss-crossing Areas A, B and C like a noose forever tightening is minor indeed, even, by her own estimation, spurious: a coincidence of dates, twenty-five years apart, that links her birth to the barbarism in the desert. It’s also ineradicable, ‘the truth of it will never stop chasing me’, like all the minor details that spring up in the novel wherever the ‘ongoing process’ of the *Nakba* (Rashid Khalidi), memoricide, and the systemic *Yedi’at haAretz* or so-called ‘knowledge of the land’ – represented by the very maps that take her, despite themselves, to the site of the horror – strive so assiduously to suppress them. One by one they take their places: a solitary reference to the ‘band of Arabs standing motionless by the spring. His eyes met their eyes’ before they’re machine-gunned, as it were, between sentences and, to all intents and purposes, removed from the record; the creatures that circle the sleeping commander in the night and deposit their deadly venom, like a judgement, or a mockery of his rage for order and conquest; the dilapidated, abandoned, ghostly remnant of a Palestinian

village in the *Naqab* (note the text's significant toponymic readjustment) which nevertheless 'seems to be in perfect harmony with nature', symbolic perhaps of a belated homecoming as the protagonist nears the very end of her journey; her own identification with the 'fly shit on a painting' rather than the finished object itself. Of course the greatest minor detail, implied by all the rest, is the four thousand year history of an indigenous culture Zionism, in its most uncompromising form, keeps sweeping with every means at its disposal from the surface of the canvas: but like the three-shot military salute of farewell to Ariel Sharon at Havat Shikmim, his family's ranch in the Negev built on the site of another depopulated Bedouin enclave (luxury suites available from Airbnb), it seems never to have the last word. 'A short while later, in a symbolic reminder of the place held by Gaza in Sharon's military and political career, two rockets fired from the nearby strip of Palestinian territory landed on the open ground' (*Guardian*, January 2014). If only the little girl from *Touch*, now grown, were on hand to overhear that gesture of defiance too.

Stephen Winfield

The match that lit the fire

Raquel Varela, *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*, Pluto Press, 2019, 352 pages, hardcase ISBN 9780745338583, £75.00, paperback ISBN 9780745338576, £19.99, Ebook ISBN 987176803580, £9.99

Until 1974 Portugal was ruled by an amalgam of military, corporate and clerical interests. Controlled by its extensive security apparatus, the regime had been able to maintain its grip on the population for 48 years. The conditions for the majority of the population were of grinding poverty with near Third World levels of living standards. Agriculturally the North comprised mainly small peasant holdings, whilst in the southern and central areas large *latifundio* estates predominated. The main industrial area was around Lisbon and the regime favoured corporatism in the shape of conglomerates, the leading group being referred to as the '*magnificent seven*'. Medium-sized companies specialized in textiles, porcelain, ceramics and glass with some penetration of the economy by foreign multinationals, which liked the absence of real trade unions and the cheap labour costs. Tourism in the Algarve began in the 1960s, but the two major contributors to the economy were the monies repatriated from the thousands of emigrants

to better paid jobs elsewhere in Europe and in the colonies, particularly Angola.

NATO armed the regime which allowed it to prosecute systematic repression of the colonial indigenous population with an inhuman ferocity. Varela tells of a strike by workers in the Angolan cotton industry put down with over 10,000 strikers and their families killed by napalm bombing. Forced labour in the colonies was commonplace and could have involved some 2,094,000 people, according to calculations made by Basil Davidson, historian of Africa. The largely conscripted army, disillusioned by colonial wars (to avoid the draft many of the youth found work in neighbouring European countries), was to provide the match that lit the fire of revolution.

Varela now takes us through the labyrinthine twists and turns of the political factions which encompassed six provisional governments in the space of a year. The author makes clear, however, that this text remains a history of the people of a nation exploring the avenues for democratic control at work, in schools, in the municipality and national government. The situation lent itself to the formation of many leftist organisations, which added another layer of confusion but stimulated political debate and action. The most consistent opposition with a history of many years of clandestine political activity was the *Partido Comunista Português*, the Portuguese Communist Party (PC). However, it was not them that sparked revolution, but a group of army officers who formed the *Movimento das Forças Armadas*, the Movement of the Armed Forces (MFA). Commanded by Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, the revolt quickly occupied the strategic control centres of Lisbon. The soldiers were joined unexpectedly by the people of Lisbon who, singing the song that had been the signal for revolt, *Grândola, Vila Morena*, and decorating the soldiers' weapons with carnations, formed a march of thousands. Despite the pleas from the military to stay at home, the exuberance of the people could not be, and was not curtailed. The events of 24 April 1974, the military rising, were largely peaceful, except for the storming of the hated PIDE security police headquarters.

Antonio Salazar, a Catholic lecturer in accountancy was *de facto* prime minister from 1932 to 1968. When Salazar died in April 1970 he was replaced by Marcelo Caetano who had trained for the priesthood and shared the same narrow-minded views on divorce and other questions of morality and equality as his former mentor. On 24 April 1974, seeking some way of stabilizing and preventing any more 'people power', Caetano surrendered power to General Spínola, a right-wing oppositionist. Caetano then fled to Madeira and later to Brazil to escape retribution for his rule of tyranny and torture. Spínola was the author of a book suggesting the merging of

Portugal's colonies with the metropolitan centre and discontinuing the colonial wars. (He had fought with Franco and the *Wehrmacht* in Russia.) Nevertheless, despite such a history he had been given authority from the MFA for such a manoeuvre and was duly appointed head of the *Junta*, then President, to be followed in quick succession by ignominy and then exile. Altogether there were six provisional governments, mostly with Communist Party and Socialist Party participation, with a sprinkling of the armed forces and far Left.

For their part the workers wasted no time in mounting what was the first of five waves of national strikes. On 1st May 1974 an unprecedented 2 million people marched in Lisbon and many of the major towns. This was, as the author says, a physical demonstration, which together with the attendant first strike wave, demonstrated to the workers of Portugal that they had the power to change society. The bogus trades unions of the dictatorship were swept away or transformed and a policy of *saneamento* applied, which meant the removal of managers who had been the dictatorship's controllers of the workforce. All over the country workers were taking over companies. In some cases the owners had fled, and put them into the workers' hands. *Saneamento* was not just for industry but also for universities, radio stations and the press. The latter could now give their uncensored views despite their owners' wishes. One notable press *cause célèbre* was that of the *Republica** newspaper where there was a struggle for power between the old owners, the Socialist Party, and the workers' committee. Members of the favoured conglomerates, local medium-sized companies and multinationals were all involved in the tumult of workers seeking both material advancement and democratic control. Workers' commissions, occupations and workers' control — all were part of the revolution, in practice and in discussion. The subtitle for *Chapter 4 - Who Governs?* puts it clearly — '*Our destiny will be made with our own hands*'. The book paints a picture of an exuberant populace — an exuberance that seemed tireless.

It was, of course, a battlefield between the various forces at work, a classic example of dual power, a situation that could not last long. One crucial force was the Movement of the Armed Forces. Led by the charismatic Otelo de Carvalho, it was largely in control of much of the armed forces. Usually aligned with the far left was the Communist Party, which had its own leftist agenda. For the communists this was the building of a TUC style body, the *Intersindical*. The Socialist Party, led by Mario Soares, was also vying for power, plus many organisations representing land workers, tenants, and not forgetting the importance of the liberation forces

in the colonies. Waiting in the wings were the centrists and residual followers of the dictatorship and Portugal's NATO allies, including Franco's Spain. Whether or not Brezhnev's Kremlin had made clear to a reluctant Communist Party that NATO would not tolerate a socialist Portugal and would move to destroy it, we will probably never know. Certainly, it would have been in line with the Soviets' conception of *realpolitik* as practised in other spheres of Cold War rivalry where the periphery could mean violent engagement through surrogates. This would mean a much greater danger of upsetting the balance in Europe's heartland and with a qualitatively higher level of threat to the world of capitalism. This was certainly the hope of many leftist visitors who came to observe this revolution to see if the idea of a socialist united Europe was a possibility.

It is the ebb and flow of the grassroots struggle which Varela charts. This was not only a revolution in the factories, but also in offices, schools, in the countryside and in all forms of cultural endeavour. The strike wave that started prior to 24 April 1974 was a response to redundancies, poor pay and conditions. The strikes continued until January 1975 and beyond with the disputes with electrical engineering firms reaching a critical stage. Workers called for demonstrations throughout Portugal with a massive march on Lisbon: it coincidentally clashed with 'military manoeuvres' by NATO. Although the Communist Party supported the demonstration, the central committee attacked the demonstration for allowing it to be on the same date and they warned against any clashes with NATO troops.

The author is quite scathing about the role of the Communist Party. The Party's primary activity was to make the *Intersindical* into one large union, which was worthy of debate, but which was not possible given their authoritarian methods. The CP was accused of violence being used to obtain results, and repression of the workforce when they achieved their aims. The workers' commissions (elected by the workers) saw themselves as the leaders of the workers' movement, and had little desire to see their organisation subsumed under a rigid party machine.

The Right had made various attempts to regain power and, after trying 'military intervention and paternalist modernisation', it was left with only one viable way forward: an attempt to impose a social democratic solution. This could only be achieved with the help of the Socialist Party. Elections were called on 25 April 1975, one year after the toppling of the old regime. The undoubted victors of the election were the Socialist Party, led by Mário Soares with 37.87% of the vote on an unbelievable electoral turnout of 91.73%. Civil unrest did not appreciably slacken, with demonstrations in support of *Republica* and land grabbing encouraged by the Catholic Church.

By September 1975 a sixth provisional government took office formed by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Party of Popular Democracy, but this did not halt the strikes and protests. By 16 November massive anti-government demonstrations in Lisbon of some 200,000 were organized by *The Provisional Secretariat of the Workers' Committees of the Lisbon Industrial Belt*. The turmoil continued with 1,200 paratroopers occupying air bases to sack the Air Force Chief of Staff. On the 25 November a small body of commandoes proclaimed a 'State of Siege' and abolished Continental Operations Command (COPCON), the Left command grouping for the armed forces. On 28 November Generals Carlos Fabião and Otelo de Carvalho were dismissed from their positions by the Provisional Government. Objectively, the Leftist turn for Portugal was halted.

To help the reader through the seeming myriad of political parties, housing organisations, trade unions etc. there is a useful list of abbreviations, together with an extensive chronology. The English language edition was trimmed by about 200 pages from the Portuguese edition and to my mind this is reflected by the paucity of detail concerning the final counter-revolution. Throughout the book there is a subtext on leadership which is addressed in a contemporary article by Tony Cliff in which he states: '*to aim to win power without first winning the proletariat is ultra-leftism adventurism*'. You can buy the book and decide whether or not this is true!

John Daniels

*The title under review has many references to *Republica*. The circumstances were also told in the pages of *Tribune* by Ken Coates, a member of a delegation of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and the Institute for Workers' Control on a visit to Portugal. In this context two contemporary titles from Spokesman should be noted. Audrey Wise MP goes into the detail of the struggle for workers' control in *Eyewitness in Revolutionary Portugal*. *Portugal: The Revolution in the Labyrinth*, edited by Jean Pierre Faye, consists of several reports on the situation in Portugal throughout this period by the Russell Committee for Portugal.