

Reviews

Conscience

Ozgur Heval Cinar and Coskun Usterci, *Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarised Society*, Zed Books, 272 pages, hardback ISBN 9781848132771, £75, paperback ISBN 9781848132788, £19.99

This interesting and, at times, mildly irritating book is a very useful contribution to the scholarship of conscientious objection. It consists of twenty-three essays, the majority of which have been written by Turkish authors. Many were presented at a conference on this subject held in January 2007 at Istanbul's Bilgi University. Granted the cultural and legal hostility to conscientious objection in Turkey, it is a surprise that the conference went ahead at all. But then the Turkish Government wants to prove its European credentials. Already a member of the Council of Europe, it wants to be granted membership of the European Union as well. In this area of human rights it has a long way to go to catch up with the rest of Europe. Essay after essay makes this very clear indeed.

There are ways of escaping Turkish conscription, but they are not based on any legal recognition of human rights. Homosexuality is one ground for exemption, but the ways in which sexual orientation has to be proved are disgusting beyond belief.

The book is not only concerned with the situation in Turkey. There are contributions covering Greece, Spain, Chile, South Africa and other countries. The description of what went on, in the past, in Spain rang a few bells with me. I well remember being told, by an official at the Spanish Embassy in London, that 'to be a Spaniard and a catholic is to be a soldier'.

This was their response to our Pax Christi opposition to the cat and mouse game played by the Franco Government with the lives of young men refusing to fight in the colonial African wars. As in many other countries, it was the Jehovah's Witnesses who led the way and who suffered greatly in regimes on both sides of the communist/capitalist divide.

An interesting book, but why is it irritating? Because there seems to be an underlying conviction expressed by many that objectors who are not

inspired by a collective desire to reform society, but who base their decisions on personal and moral grounds, are somehow second class citizens in the world of conscientious objection. The real CO needs to be 'anti-patriarchal, anti-heteronormative, anti-homophobic and pro-feminist', one author suggests. Some of my heroes amongst those who have refused at great cost, such as Franz Jagerstatter who was executed in August '43, had no notion of social change at all. But they stood and died for a moral principle.

It is also a little irritating that the reader is meant to have more than working knowledge of European legal and political structures. Without such knowledge it is difficult to follow the ramifications of the legal road to the recognition of conscientious objection as a human right.

The 'historical' essays were of great interest to me. I had no idea how much influence Prussian militarism had on the Turkish state long before Attaturk arrived on the scene. Universal conscription we owe of course to Napoleon, but it was refined and polished by Kaiser Wilhelm 1, who launched the phrase about 'the nation in arms'.

The Prussians set about the wholesale militarisation of the state. Said a German-trained Turkish Staff major, in 1908, 'there is no separation between the army and the nation'.

'Peace time should be regarded as the continuation of wartime without fighting,' said another. Militarised as our own British society is today, we have little idea of how the army still dominates in Turkish life, which is why granting rights to conscientious objectors is so difficult.

The global statistics are of great interest too. There are at the moment 192 'sovereign' states. More than 20 have no armed forces. 168 of them do and 80 of those rely on volunteer forces. Some 88 still depend on conscription. Turkey is the only member of the Council of Europe not to grant alternative service rights to COs. There are devious ways of escaping service in Turkey, so it is probably only the most honest and straightforward who find themselves in head-on collision with the law.

What the book does not deal with is how we can resist the claims of a militarised society even if we are not confronted with the call to arms. Supporting 'Conscience', once known as the Peace Tax Campaign, is one such way. Choice of occupation is another. I have always felt that when Joseph Rotblat refused to continue to work on the atomic bomb, in 1944, that his was a CO stance.

Not everything can go into 272 pages. There is more than enough in this book to make it both important and useful.

Bruce Kent

Nemesis

George Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning*, 336 pages, South End Press, updated 2009, paperback ISBN 9780896087873, \$18

David Strahan, *The Last Oil Shock: A survival guide to the imminent extinction of petroleum man*, 304 pages, John Murray, paperback ISBN 9780719564246, £8.99

Tristram Stuart, *Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Scandal*, 496 pages, Penguin, ISBN 978-0141036342, £9.99

Jeremy Leggett, *Half Gone: Oil, Gas, , Hot Air and the Global Energy Crisis*, Portobello Books, 322 pages, paperback ISBN 9781846270055, £8.99

Nemesis is the fate that awaits humans' overweening pride. The human species is the only animal which fouls its own nest, which wastes most of the food it collects, and which uses more resources than it creates. And it is the only animal which is conscious of its actions. It knows what it is doing, but still does it, however harmful to itself. Humans have survived and multiplied by dominating their environment, but this way leads to disaster. For long we were in denial. Marion King Hubbert's prediction of the oil peak was first published in 1956, Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' appeared in 1962, the Club of Rome warned of *The Limits to Growth* in the 1970s, and Peter Peeters added, in 1979, warnings of wars for resources by the year 2010. A host of books has been published in the last few years, of which the four under review here are among the latest. The warnings are becoming insistent, but they may be too late, unless actions are taken by governments and individuals NOW. These books tell us what we could still do to stave off disaster.

It has become obvious to everyone that the climate is changing, but doubts remain about the seriousness of the effects on human lives. No one who reads the latest paperback edition of George Monbiot's book, *Heat*, can still have any doubts. Glaciers really are shrinking and ice floes melting as the temperature of the sea rises, low lying lands are being flooded and hurricanes increasing. And this is due to human activity, involving the release of what are called 'greenhouse' gases – carbon dioxide and methane – through production and consumption of fuel mainly for heat and power and transport, through the destruction of forests, which absorb these carbons, and through waste in the production and disposal of food. Thus it is that all three of the issues raised in the three books under review are connected – the heating up of the planet's surface, the oil shock,

and our food waste. As supplies of oil run out, alternative sources of energy will have to emit no more greenhouse gases than oil, and one way to reduce total emissions would be to tackle food waste.

The central fact which we are being asked to recognise is that economic growth, as we have known it, is not sustainable. Something has to go. We have relied on steadily increasing supplies of energy being available for more production and consumption. Economists, as David Strahan points out, have always neglected, or at least underplayed, the element of energy in economic growth. Sources of energy have been literally undervalued, extra energy being assumed to contribute about 5% to generate growth, when 70% would be nearer the truth. Most of this energy comes from oil. Those scientists who have investigated the oil deposits in the planet's surface believe that they have by now all been discovered, although not all proven. With this knowledge they calculate that about half of this total has already been used up, and oil production will peak within a few years. Maintaining current rates of consumption, which are increasing every year, must therefore be from a steadily declining pool. The result will inevitably be escalating prices and sudden disruptions when particular sources run out.

Some optimists believe that the large deposits of tar sands in Canada and elsewhere can still be developed, but Strahan quotes experts who warn that this development requires the use of water and gas; and gas reserves are subject to the same limits as oil. Others have been putting their faith in bio-fuels produced from agricultural crops. The development of bio-fuels has already put up the price of cereals, to the great disadvantage of those poor families whose very lives depend on the availability of cheap food. Agricultural products are now being used in place of petro-chemicals in the manufacture of plastics. We are also eating more meat, which needs much more input of grains than a vegetarian diet. So, our food supplies are under pressure from three directions. The result is the further destruction of forests to make land available for the production of grains, and this only adds to the gases in the atmosphere and accelerates global warming.

So, what can be done? All governments are promising to make reductions in the greenhouse gas emissions from their countries. The aim is to prevent a global warming greater than 2 degrees centigrade by making continuous reductions up to the year 2030. For the UK this would mean a cut of 91% in emissions per head. Most British Government figures, according to Monbiot, only include carbon dioxide emissions, and another fifth should be added for other gases such as methane. Worse than this, their target would imply, according to the Government's Stern Report, a rise of 3 degrees centigrade of warming. Rather surprisingly, Monbiot quotes a Conservative

Party statement that would seek to stabilise Co2 concentrations at a level below the 2 degrees centigrade equivalent. This would imply draconian restrictions on air and car travel, a massive increase in renewable sources of energy, from wind turbines, photo-voltaic solar panels, ground source heat pumps, and the conversion of electricity generation to combined heat and power production in small-scale gas-fired power stations.

Carbon trading has got a bad name because it has seemed to be a way for the rich, who are most responsible for emissions, to buy rights to be allowed to make these by paying the poor who make the least. But what are called *tradable energy quotas* are put forward in Strahan's book as the best way of persuading individuals, businesses and governments to accept the limitations that have to be made to control global warming. Each country would have a carbon budget for each year set by an independent energy policy committee, like the Bank of England's interest rate committee. The budget would be shared out in rations of so many units for individuals, government and businesses. These could be assessed like taxation and would make everyone think seriously about their carbon footprint. Then ration holders could buy or sell units, according to their needs, but with a cap to prevent hogging.

The big issue would be the size of the initial national budgets, which would have to be agreed internationally, and would have to penalise the big polluters. Would they ever agree to make savings? Some could perhaps be shamed by exposure of the facts. One great advantage of such a scheme would be that individuals, governments and businesses would be encouraged to work out ways of co-operating, for example, by reducing trade, car sharing, combining deliveries, saving waste, and so on. Waste of food is a very largely unrecognised cause of the unnecessary use of energy and gas emissions.

Tristram Stuart's book provides a shocking revelation of a crying scandal in our wasteful food habits. Between the food grower and the consumer something like a half of what is produced goes to waste. The supermarkets are the main culprits, in their practices of overstocking, transporting food long distances, homogenising everything, so that potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and bananas, for example, have to have no irregularities, and rejecting the rest. But farmers themselves waste great quantities of produce and land by all increasing production when prices rise. Most consumers, moreover, throw away all their parings, peel and banana skins, tea and coffee grounds, and made up foods that have passed their 'sell by' date. All these could go to pig swill.

Jeremy Leggett was a lecturer in Earth Sciences at Imperial College, then an oil company consultant, but became, in 1989, UK chief scientist

for Greenpeace and is now chief executive of Solarcentury, the UK's largest independent solar electric company. As such he has credibility when he writes regularly for *The Guardian*, and warned as recently as September 3rd this year, that 'Peak Oil' can only be a few years away even after the new oil discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico and elsewhere. 'Peak Oil' is the term used by the oil experts for the time when oil consumption begins to exceed oil availability from current production and proven available reserves. Oil prices are already around five times what they were in the 1960s, and can be expected to rise even faster as supplies are depleted. The same applies to natural gas. Leggett's *Half Gone* argues the case for early topping of the peak, but combines this with dire warnings of the effect on the planet's climate of oil consumption at current, ever growing rates.

Leggett is at pains to explain how it came about that the oil experts have been for so long in denial. The giant oil companies obviously wished to maintain their dominant position in the world economy, but to this end exaggerated the size of reserves they held. Governments were heavily influenced by the oil companies, but also tended to think no further into the future than the next election. Only the few independent experts such as Leggett at Greenpeace did that, and the general public, enjoying the pleasures of high consumption, had no desire to listen to the warnings of a bunch of 'Green' fanatics. Only very recently opinion has begun to change as oil prices rise and climate shows every sign of change. But what to do about the increasing carbon footprint is quite unclear. Small savings in electricity used is about as far as popular opinion has reached, and a certain sense that the credit crunch and rising unemployment may be a blessing in disguise (for some).

Leggett's book has changed and reinforced my own thinking. This has been changed in relation to the timing of the 'peak', which I now accept must come very soon indeed, and reinforced it in relation to the alternatives available to reduce our ever-rising oil consumption. Leggett shows how the oil companies really have exaggerated their existing production capacities and their oil reserves, and the potential use of tar sand deposits. The latter would themselves require enormous quantities of oil and also of water to develop. Of the non-carbon creating alternatives, coal liquefaction and sequestration are ruled out on the grounds of cost compared with the use of energy from sun, wind and waves. Nuclear power is ruled out for the same reason, but also because of the problems of disposing of the nuclear waste and preventing terrorist sabotage.

Why, then, are we not pressing governments by every means at our

disposal to step up work – which would give jobs to those unemployed as a result of the financial crisis – on developing the alternative energy sources from the sun, the wind and the waves? The explanation is that this would involve a revolution, not necessarily a political revolution, but a revolution in our thinking. Instead of relying on giant plants, vast refineries, national grids and innumerable distribution networks, the alternatives would mean local, individual and community action. The example is given by Leggett of the small town of Woking in Surrey, which since 1990 has cut its carbon dioxide emissions by three quarters, using a hybrid energy system, involving private wires, CHP — Combined Heat and Power — in groups of buildings (mostly natural gas but some biomass), solar PV – Photo Voltaic cells – and energy efficiency, plus some fuel cells and absorption chillers. Old peoples’ homes and housing estates had made their own mini-energy worlds. The grid could go for ever. My only doubt is about bio-mass if this means competition with food supplies. But what matters is that a whole community would have to act together. If a town of 80,000 could do it, Ken Livingstone employed the Woking energy manager (Allan Jones) to do it for London’s 8 million. What is Boris Johnson doing?

None of this suggests that we can avoid a total reduction in our energy use – in cars, air flights, heating, freezing, lighting, air conditioning – through more and better public transport, car pooling, holidays at home, house insulation, nil waste, communal services. All this once again implies a revolution in our attitude to consumption both as individuals and communities. Leggett is optimistic, believing that a beginning has already begun and change will accelerate as new habits develop, and the example of Woking is copied and we see in Sweden the Government, local and national, business, academics, and farmers reach their aim of becoming an oil-free economy in a decade. It can be done.

Each of these books contains long lists of what we could all begin to do to reduce the dangers of climate change. But governments have to do far more – not only taxing the big spenders, but subsidising and developing non-fossil forms of energy and, above all, coming clean about the real facts of oil depletion, climate change and waste, and educating the public in the implications of these facts.

*Michael Barratt Brown
who three decades ago installed solar panels on the
roof of his Derbyshire home, and recently installed new ones.*

Radiation and Consent

Ellen Leopold, *Under the Radar – Cancer and the Cold War*, Rutgers University Press, 304 pages, hardback ISBN 9780813544045, £23.50

Ellen Leopold is described in Google searches as an independent researcher and as a member of the Women's Community Cancer Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her first book on cancer, *A Darker Ribbon: Women and their Doctors in the Twentieth Century*, *A Social History of Breast Cancer*, was published in 1999. Like Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, she is herself a breast cancer survivor.

Ionising radiation and consent are the connections that Ellen Leopold makes between cancer and the Cold War, and she establishes them firmly in the early pages of this book. She refers to the *Down-winders* of Nevada and the estimated 140,000 fatal cancers caused by atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in the United States. At the end of the Cold War, in 1999, Karl Z Morgan, an Atomic Energy Commission physicist, stated that

'The greatest irony of our atmospheric nuclear testing program is that the only victims of US nuclear weapons since World War II have been our own people.'

No one is on record as having sought the consent of the Down-winders.

Leopold begins her book with an account of the similar hubris in the use of cobalt radiation therapy for breast cancer in the 1950s, which injured, among others, Irma Nathanson, a young mother in Wichita, Kansas. The detail is available in the record of *Nathanson v Kline*, which Leopold uses to create a carefully detailed but highly readable and gripping account of the arguments for informed consent. Nathanson sued her radiologist, John R Kline, after years of painful medical treatments for the injuries caused by what are now regarded as exceptional doses of cobalt 60 radiation, advised by Kline as a precaution against a recurrence of cancer after apparently successful mastectomy. The radiation wounds to her chest were such that successive attempts to close the chest cavity by skin grafting failed. She was transferred to the care of a surgeon who was specialised in the treatment of radiation injuries suffered by workers at Eniwetok Atoll after nuclear weapon tests in the late 1940s.

Dead tissue, muscle, cartilage and several ribs had to be removed before further skin grafts could be attempted. Irma Nathanson had already lost the use of her left arm, which later became gangrenous, requiring amputation of the lower part, and her left lung was collapsed. The court case ended with an out-of-court settlement of an undisclosed sum for the plaintiff with

costs against the radiologist and the hospital. The case is significant for the plaintiff's evidence of a lack of informed consent. No evidence of her being advised of the possible consequences of cobalt 60 radiation treatment was offered, and Justice Schroeder's opinion on the nature and limitations of informed consent has influenced later litigation and medical practice. Surprisingly, the disabled Irma Nathanson survived for another 33 years until she died of other, possibly related, cancers.

The author makes a penetrating analysis of the effect of the Cold War on the American public. Here is a sample of her writing.

'When the anti-Soviet propaganda became less shrill and air raid drills less frequent, the sense of imminent danger began to fade. Further disarmament treaties with the Soviet Union in 1974 and 1978 enhanced the growing sense of national security. With it came a relaxation of the command structures that had held traditional social hierarchies in place and unaware of one another.

The loosening of the doctor-patient relationship owes something to this easing of the prevailing crisis mentality just as it does to the rise in feminine consciousness. As one grew weaker the other grew stronger. The feeling of stepping back from the brink permitted Americans to speak more openly, to pursue pent-up grievances closer to home without the fear of reprisals. Authority in any guise (whether professional, corporate, elected, or male) could now be challenged with greater impunity. Many activist groups were set to try.'

One of the effects of the Cold War secrecy described by the author is that only one person in five in the USA thought that fall-out was dangerous, even though half a million people had been exposed to it without their agreement, and many of them died as a result. The author records that it had been seen as unpatriotic to question the bomb tests. Interestingly, she notes that the nuclear industry found in its surveys that women 'lack nuclear enthusiasm'. The explanation could be that women have good reason to fear the mutagenic effects of radiation and other agents on the foetus and the possibility of giving birth to a seriously deformed child.

The author's analysis extends to an examination of the nuclear regulators, the pressures for deregulation by those constrained by regulation, the structure of the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), the accountability of the World Health Organisation to the International Atomic Energy Agency on radiation matters, and the application of the precautionary principle.

The author has other useful insights into the pharmaceutical industry's search for anti-cancer drugs and the lack of meaningful surveys into the overall long-term effects of the 'war on cancer'. She leaves open the question of why cancer mortality has doubled in the USA since World War

Two (but she mentions the relative success in the control of cardiovascular disease), and she speculates on the development of a culture in which cancer patients, and not only those who use tobacco and alcohol, can be made to feel responsible for their ill health. She questions the American Medical Association's sometimes unquestioning acceptance of the uses of radiation in diagnosis and treatment without adequate audit of each patient's cumulative exposure, and she sees a need for better public understanding of the way in which radiation is measured. She notes that people know more about risk measurement in diet than they do about radiation. The considerable benefits of the CT (computerised tomography) scanning, for example, have to be set against a dose exceptionally as high as 44 millisieverts for a pelvic area scan – double the annual dose allowed to a worker in the nuclear industry, and 44 times higher than a nuclear industry dose to a member of the public.

We need more authors with the capable and penetrating curiosity of Ellen Leopold, Helen Caldicott, author of *Nuclear Power is Not the Answer* (reviewed in *Spokesman* 99), and Rosalie Bertell who wrote 'Why Chernobyl Still Matters' for the *Journal of Humanitarian Medicine* (reproduced in 2003 in *Spokesman* 78) in which she, too, detailed the structural inadequacies of the UN nuclear agencies and the 'self-established' International Commission on Radiological Protection. That authors on nuclear matters be independent of the industry is becoming even more necessary as commercial confidentiality is added to government secrecy and misinformation.

Christopher Gifford

Victor's Justice

John Laughland, *A History of Political Trials: From Charles I to Saddam Hussein*, Peter Lang, 316 pages, paperback ISBN 9781906165000, £12.99

This is a meticulously documented study of the trials of former heads of state: Charles I and Louis XVI; the leaders of the French Third Republic; Marshal Petain, Quisling, the Nazi and Japanese leaders; war-time leaders in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Finland and Greece; the Greek colonels, Emperor Bokassa and the Argentine generals; more recently, Ceaucescu, Honecker, Kambanda in Rwanda, Milosevic and Saddam Hussein. The book uses history admirably to illuminate current issues. It refutes the widespread assertion that the trial of former political leaders, which is becoming increasingly common, is unprecedented, and argues

convincingly that the trials conducted by the special tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court, have much in common with earlier political trials.

There have been no acquittals of heads of state. As Danton said, ‘A king is dead as soon as he appears in front of his judges’. The trials of both kings were political and even religious acts, calculated to find a scapegoat and consolidate the new regime.

Laughland draws attention to the irregularities which have characterised all the trials, not to exonerate the defendants, at least morally, but to show that, in all such trials, the prosecution is as political as the defence, and to look at the profound *constitutional* issues raised by the trials.

In the nineteenth century, international laws to regulate war were formulated at the Hague and Geneva. The enemy was considered to have the right to fight, and from this flowed the provisions for the humane treatment of prisoners. The First World War saw a return to a Manichean view of the enemy as the embodiment of evil. The Treaty of Versailles asserted Germany’s exclusive war guilt and called for the trial of the Kaiser. It applied retrospective rules, prosecuted individuals on the losing side rather than laying down a general law, and proclaimed the defendants guilty in advance. Subsequent trials, including those by the special tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, have also been ‘victor’s justice’ and done the same. They have also rejected ‘legal formalities’ concerning evidence; used anonymous witnesses and ‘expert witnesses’ who have witnessed nothing; suppressed evidence and falsified trial reports; and introduced ‘joint criminal conspiracy’ by which a defendant can be convicted of a crime which he did not commit, order, know about or intend. In the Rwandan case – the defining event in subsequent military interventions and trials – the former Prime Minister was found guilty of genocide without a trial, on the basis of a confession which he immediately withdrew, claiming that it was made under duress, for fear of his family’s safety, and following advice by a lawyer imposed on him by the prosecution, who was a friend of the prosecutor.

Laughland questions whether acts of state can be treated like private crimes. His criticism of the ‘new’ system of international law is not only that it perverts justice and history and rarely encourages reconciliation, but also that it has undermined the old one. It is linked with a ‘liberal imperialist’ project which rejects the constraints of ‘classical’ international law, in pursuit of which the United States and the Nato countries have undertaken aggressive war, state destruction, ‘coercive’ bombing, mass population expulsions, and the torture of prisoners.

The question remains, what should be done when oppressive regimes are

overthrown? Laughland does not answer this question because it is a political judgement to which no simple answer can be laid down in advance.

A good regime trial would be one in which the new sovereign displayed the political virtues as Aristotle defined them; courage, moderation, magnanimity and prudence. Today's human rights advocates, by contrast, are inspired by a punishment ethic which sits ill with these virtues, and which often prefers war over peace in the name of 'justice'.

Laughland points out that war crimes are already covered by the Geneva and Hague Conventions. Such crimes can and should be prosecuted under these Conventions, but national tribunals are preferable to international ones because they are more deeply embedded in the national culture and more open to the checks and balances of public opinion. The programme to create new international tribunals and a new jurisdiction is a similar blunt instrument to the punishment of tyrannical kings by revolutionary republican tribunals in the past.

It is hard to read this book without concluding that the trials organised by the special tribunals and the International Criminal Court have been a perversion of the judicial process, and a backward step in the development of international humanitarian law. It is impossible, in a short review, to convey the scope, depth, and incisiveness of this iconoclastic book. I can only urge people concerned with the rule of law to read it.

Graham Hallett

Graham Hallett is the author of European Security in the Post-Soviet Age: The Case against Nato (www.caseagainstnato.co.uk).

Slaves

Cynthia McLeod, *The Free Negress Elisabeth*, translated from the Dutch by Brian Doyle, Arcadia Books, 320 pages, paperback ISBN 9781905147830, £11.99

'Rothschild and Freshfields founders had links to slavery, papers reveal'. That was the lengthy, front-page headline of the *Financial Times* on 28 June 2009, above its photograph of a nineteenth century ledger of 'Slave Compensation Counter Claims' for the Colony of St Christopher, now known as St Kitt's, in the West Indies.

Freshfields is one of the City's 'top four "Magic Circle" UK law firms', according to the FT. One of its founders, James William Freshfield, 'counterclaimed' for three groups of slaves in St Christopher, basing the claim on unpaid legal fees regarding an earlier sale of the Belle Tête estate

and its slaves. The claim, which was later withdrawn, was made under a Government compensation scheme for slave owners, following the partial abolition of slavery in the 1830s.

Nathan Mayer Rothschild and his brother, Baron James de Rothschild, agreed that £3,000 owed to Lord James O'Bryen by the purchaser of his estate in Antigua should be secured to NM Rothschild himself by a mortgage over 88 slaves on the estate. The slaves were collateral in case the debtor defaulted, which he duly did. NM Rothschild used the compensation scheme to secure the £3,000, which was eventually awarded to his estate after his death.

These revelations follow discoveries made in the National Archives at Kew, which have been prominently reported in the FT. They could be costly, both financially and in turns of reputation, for modern-day and high profile descendants of those whose wealth was bolstered by the proceeds of the slave trade. During three centuries, that trade shipped some eleven million people across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the Americas and West Indies. Some of their descendants are acutely aware of a need for redress.

The story of *The Free Negress Elizabeth* Samson pre-dates the events reported in the FT. Her diaries recount her experiences in the Dutch colony of Suriname in South America during the eighteenth century, as well as in Holland itself, where she travelled to clear her name of a trumped-up legal charge. Elisabeth's mother had her freedom purchased before her daughter was born. Elisabeth was therefore never a slave herself, hence the description 'Free'. In addition, she was gifted in music and business, activities which were encouraged in the household where she grew up. She steadily accumulated considerable personal wealth, much to the envy of other plantation owners in Suriname, who were growing coffee and sugar for the Dutch market, using slave labour. Her long-term partner and the man she wished to marry, Carl Otto Creutz, pre-deceased her.

Marriage between blacks and whites was actively discouraged in eighteenth century Suriname, if not expressly banned, as many colonists maintained. Elisabeth contested this alleged ban when she married Hermanus Daniel Zobre, following Creutz's death. She was to die herself only a few years later, leaving most of her property to her young husband, and thus to the white community, as the colony's administrators had hoped.

Abolition of slavery was still many decades away, yet opposition amongst escaped slaves, known as Maroons, was becoming steadily bolder. The Maroons, as well as the slaves themselves, had much to fear from the colonists. Physical punishment was frequent and brutal. Execution was summary for Maroons who were caught. Yet the

interactions of colonists and slaves were intimate and fecund. Many mixed-race children, described as mulattos, were born. But Elisabeth herself never had children. This didn't excuse her from denunciations from the pulpit of the Dutch church she attended, and supported financially, in Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname.

Cynthia McLeod is the daughter of the last governor and first president of Suriname. She has written a restrained account of Elisabeth's experiences, elegantly translated by Brian Doyle, and equipped with a useful glossary. It is, at the same time, something of a chronicle of the vicissitudes of the Dutch Empire during the eighteenth century. But, most of all, it is testimony to slavery's financial enrichment of Europe, and Elisabeth's self-emancipation.

Tony Simpson

Scots in Spain

Daniel Gray, *Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War*, Luath Press, 256 pages, paperback ISBN13 9781906817169, £9.99

Each year in Glasgow a group of labour movement activists gather on the banks of the Clyde in front of Customs House, at the other side of the suspension bridge from where Glasgow Trades Council used to meet. They gather at the base of the statue of Dolores Ibárruri – La Pasionaria. They gather in memory of the contribution of the Scottish volunteers to Republican Spain, to fight the Falangist fascists in the Spanish Civil War.

The Spanish Civil War was a call to arms for 2,300 British volunteers, of which more than 500 were from Scotland. The first book of its kind, Daniel Gray's *Homage to Caledonia* examines Scotland's role in the conflict, detailing exactly why Scottish involvement was so profound. The book moves chronologically through events and places, firstly surveying the landscape in contemporary Scotland before describing volunteers' journeys to Spain, and then tracing their every involvement from arrival to homecoming (or not). There is also an account of the non-combative role, from fundraising for Spain and medical aid, to political manoeuvrings within the volatile Scottish Left.

It may come as a surprise, but the legacy of divisions over this issue on the Left in Scotland can resurface even today. I can remember being at a screening of Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* in Dundee when it reached the scenes following the falling-out between the communists and the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). At this point two elderly comrades in front of me became particularly agitated, and started providing the audience with an alternative narrative, only to be confronted

by another elderly voice from within the darkness of the cinema declaring he had been there and Loach was right.

Using a wealth of previously unpublished letters sent back from the front as well as other archival items, Daniel Gray is able to tell little known stories of courage in conflict, and to call into question accepted versions of events such as the murder of Bob Smillie, or the heroism of ‘The Scots Scarlet Pimpernel’.

Homage to Caledonia offers a very human take on events in Spain. For every tale of abject distress in a time of war, there is a tale of a Scottish volunteer urinating in his general’s boots, knocking back a dram with Errol Flynn, or appalling Spanish comrades with his pipe playing.

What does come through from *Homage to Caledonia* is the level of political awareness amongst the volunteers, which was added to, no doubt, by the provision of political education within the battalions. They recognised that, under the circumstances of advancing fascism, not to intervene is to intervene, especially when the fascists are being supported externally. The Brigaders, or particularly the ILP element from Scotland, had sussed out that the republicans’ decision not to include a social revolution within their struggle was a mistake, which would weaken their political appeal to the masses. There was no doubt as to what Franco’s objectives were. The foresight shown in these arguments from the Left can be found in what followed, in that it took until the 1980s before Spain, Portugal and Greece managed to leave behind NATO supported totalitarian rule for good and become members of the European Union

At the beginning of his book, Daniel Gray quotes from another on the subject, *From the Calton to Catalonia* by John and Willy Maley (Glasgow City Libraries). The extract is written in Glaswegian Scots and describes conditions in the East End of Glasgow in the 1930s.

‘When they three (Franco, Mussolini, Hitler) goat thegither an came up against the Spanish workers, they didnae expect the Calton tae offer handers.’

This extract encapsulates the poverty from which many of the proportionately large number of Scots volunteers who went to Spain came. It also emphasises their vision.

‘They wur internationalists. They wur Europeans. They wur Scots.’

Gray’s book, acknowledged in its Foreword by Tony Benn as ‘important and powerful’, is not only a culmination of extensive academic research, but also a personal gathering of information from relatives of International Brigaders and the now sadly deceased Steve Fullarton, the last Scottish

International Brigader.

Daniel Gray includes a chronology of events showing clear links from the General Strike of 1926 through to the Spanish Civil War itself, to Franco's victory in 1939, Hitler's invasion of Poland, and the start of World War Two.

Gray's writing style is easy to read and the text is accompanied by photographs throughout. Although in his introduction he says the book is 'a social history rather than a military one', he does of necessity speak of events experienced by the Brigaders in relation to the war and turbulent politics of the time. He makes it clear that the period should be viewed 'through the prism of 1930s Scotland', a time of hope and high ideals that may seem foreign in our more cynical, individualistic times. The overwhelming sentiments that come across in the book from the Brigaders and, indeed, from their families are those of pride in having taken part, and their lack of regret in doing so. It is inspiring and humbling in equal measure.

It is seventy years since Glasgow welcomed home from foreign fields a group of its soldier sons. They had not, though, volunteered for service in the regular army, but as members of the International Brigades that participated on the republican side in the Spanish Civil War. *The Glasgow Herald* marked the Brigaders' 11th December 1938 return from Spain with a fascinating account of their arrival. A vast crowd gathered at Central Station to greet the men, many of them waiting, as the *Herald* reported, 'to hear whether their relatives and friends who had gone out to Spain were returning or had been killed in action'.

The stories of many of the 90 volunteers who returned to Glasgow that day, and the other 500 Scots who participated in Spain, are contained in *Homage to Caledonia: Scotland and the Spanish Civil War*, which is the first book to document and celebrate the great sacrifices made by Scots and Scotland for the Spanish republic. It demonstrates the extent to which Glasgow and Scotland turned the Spanish war into their own.

Henry McCubbin

Mayakovsky

Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Pro Eto – That's What*, translated by Larisa Gureyeva and George Hyde, illustrated by Alexander Rodchenko, Arc Publications, 172 pages, paperback ISBN 9781904614319, £12.99

Mayakovsky's is one of the more recognisable faces of the Russian Revolution. While Lenin bestrode the platform, leaning forward to

emphasise his points to the crowd, all captured on movie film, in this volume Mayakovsky is deceptively still and solid, darkened eyes beneath a heavy brow and woollen cap. He inhabits Rodchenko's playful photomontages which interpret, rather literally, the tortured progress of the poet's own 'Ballad of Reading Gaol', proceeding to 'Christmas Eve', and culminating in a concluding section revealingly entitled 'Application on Behalf of ... please, comrade chemist, fill it in yourself'.

The rhythm seems to echo Oscar Wilde's own relentless rumble, which is captured very well in this feisty translation:

The music of the ballad sure ain't new –
but if its words are words of pain
and its words describe the pain again
the ballad too renews its old refrain.

Lily Brik, wife of Mayakovsky's publisher, Osip Brik, was, it seems, the most immediate cause of the poet's pain. *That's What*, a loose translation of the Russian 'Pro Eto', literally 'about this', is 'dedicated to her and to me'. Lily also inhabits Rodchenko's montages, so he seemed to know what Mayakovsky's theme really was, even if the poet was more suggestive and less explicit.

Arc have produced a handsome Russian-English edition of this personal epic of the early years of the Revolution, first published in the LEF journal (Left Front of the Arts) in 1923. George Hyde adds a lively note on 'Translating Mayakovsky's *That's What*'. His co-translator, Larisa Gureyeva, is the granddaughter of V.M. Molotov-Skryabin, co-signatory of the notorious pact with Germany of 1939.

Hyde writes of the 'permissive' 1920s in the early Soviet Union. Following the recent splendid exhibition of Rodchenko and Popova at the Tate Modern (see Spokesman 105), there are increasing signs of a growing interest in the early, tumultuous years of the Russian Revolution.

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