



*John Smith by Ken Gill  
(see page 94)*

# Reviews

## Black Gold

**David John Douglas, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, a revised edition of an earlier 2002 edition, published in 2008 by Read 'n' Noir, an imprint of Christie Books of Hastings, East Sussex, distributed by Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Road, London E9 5LN, 354 pages including end notes and a glossary, paperback ISBN 9781873976340, £9.99**

This autobiography is described by the publisher as the first volume of a trilogy, *Stardust and Coaldust*, of which a second volume, *The Wheel's Still in Spin*, appeared in 2009 (to be reviewed later). The volume reviewed here describes the first 20 years of the life of David John Douglas (Dave), born in Tyneside in 1948 of loving parents – a caring Irish-Catholic mother and a thoughtful, tolerant, Methodist, mine-worker father.

David Douglas may not have intended it, but the story so far is of the 'radicalisation' (such a useful word these days) of a working class child. It started only gently at home with some verbal history of mineworker abuse over the ages, but mainly at school with endemic bullying by pupils and staff. Corporal punishment at school was routine, and expectations were low. In spite of all that, his humour is poignant, piercingly honest and irrepressible. You will laugh alright. How could the teachers cope when every child, even in the 1960s, had an inkpot in his or her desk.

*Ink monitors, trusted clean kids, let loose on a galvie jug full of the stuff, trusted to its safe distribution. Little hands hold forth the pot as line by line the galvie jug lad walks down the isle, like a priest at communion. Tipping each in turn, until – until that evil temptation takes grip and the jug is tipped, the pot filled, overfilled, and the ink flows down the arms, over the bare leg down the shoe and into a pool on the wooden floor.*

His religious education was intense to the point of destruction. When Mother had moved him to a Catholic school he learned the catechism.

*'Who made you?*

*God made me.*

*Why did God make you?*

*God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him in this world and for ever in the next.'*

*In the juniors each would sit carrying out the gestures which accompanied the words.*

*'What will God say to the souls of the just?'*

*'God will say to the souls of the just "Come ye (ranks of small arms beckon and draw into self embrace) blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for ye".'*

*'What will God say to the souls of the damned?'*

*'God will say to the souls of the damned, "Depart from me, ye cursed (arms fly out to the right, planned slapstick accidents occur throughout the room, the boy backhands the boy to the right, who has swiped the girl to his right, who in turn has garrotted a taller lad to her right) into everlasting flames (fingers jab toward the floor, the nearest thigh gets poked, fingers stub on desks, books in ready piles for distribution tumble to the floor) which were prepared for the devil and his angel".'*

*Hysteria grips the scene, small faces contort with suppressed laughter; here and there, hands grip sides or genitals to suppress the pain of mirth or a sudden urge to piss. The outrage of the catechism-waiving teacher only adds to the glory of the mayhem.*

*'Get out, you clown!' A boy dragged from his seat by the ear.*

*'Silence, clowns!' the baritone depth of the hippo female in full flight accompanied by smacks round offending ears – or any ears.*

In the infants' school he was imprisoned by older boys in a toilet cubicle from which he escaped by crawling 'belly-flopper under the wooden bays through pools of piss'. But there were lighter moments, as when the girls in a segregated playground captured a boy to be kissed by the girl who had ordered the kidnap, or when girls doing handstands could be observed with inverted skirts and knickers and bare waists wholly exposed. An engagement with knickers and his sexual development repeats itself throughout the book, with one account of helpful girls revealing to this reviewer that Lancashire lasses were not as forward as those from County Durham or, if they were, it was harder to find them as a Primitive Methodist.

In the primary school he was told nothing of the eleven-plus. Others were selected for practice with former 11-plus papers. When he sat the tests he provided a proper ending for the 'comprehension' story, while ignoring the questions at the bottom about the meaning of words that he

did not understand. Not only did he fail, but at secondary school he was selected for the 'C' stream, which every teacher hated. It was a school that regarded his use of a public library as a matter requiring investigation. Later, he became a mineworker and, much later, he was to become a day-release university student, a political activist, and a writer whose autobiography is authentic, essential social history.

Confession provided him with a defining experience. After one of the 'more daring sorties behind the class cupboard door', he thought it best to mention it for fear of meeting his maker in an unblessed unforgiving state. He decided to slip in the real sin amongst the more regular misdemeanours.

*'Bless me, Father, for I have sinned, it is three weeks since my last confession ... I have been bad tempered. I have back-answered my mother and father, I have told lies, I have been immodest, I have missed prayers, I have not had communion for three weeks since, Lord forgive me and by thy will I will never sin again.'*

*All the while the priest whispered, 'Yes, Yes, Yes.' Not noticed? Then, in a deep resounding Galway voice: 'Tell me now, son, and how was it you were immodest?'*

*'Well, I felt myself getting hot, I touched another's body, Father.'*

*'Now, was it a girl or a boy, my child?' Me lips were getting dry.*

*'A girl, Father.'*

*'And where did you touch her body, my son?' I hadn't banked on this ... the courage all gone now.*

*'Her stomach, Father, her stomach.'*

*'Is that where you touched her?'*

*'Yes, Father, her stomach.' I thought of somewhere lower and thought God would think my sexual navigation was out of order again and tried to conceal the thought of that thought in case he seen that as well.*

*'Well, son, if this is a good confession, you must say five Hail Marys and four Glorybetothefathers.'*

*A sinner, I left and went to the rail, to reason that it was a farce. Marx had said it was opium. The Little Lenin Library, from which I intended to be a little Lenin, explained the world in material ways: you were in a church of fear, now was the time to break it. I walked from the church, no longer clean. Gabriel kept his pad intact. The row at home came later.*

Eight pages of dedications of a book is unusual. In this they start with ‘The ancient echo of a Celtic Northumbria’. The list with many comments added includes mention of a Scottish republican army and John Lilburne, founder of the Levellers (1649), jailed by Cromwell, and eventually

*To the hundreds of jailed, beaten, sacked and blacklisted insurgent men, women and children of the coalfields of Northumberland and Durham who fought back with everything that flesh and blood could muster in the great battle of 1984/5.*

The author explains that much of his story (through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Young Communists, Anarchists, Trotskyites, the Young Unemployed Workers League, his time as a hippie free love advocate, and work as a trade union activist) ‘sails close to the wind of illegality’. He admits to having blurred some events and changed some names because particulars may still be ‘on file’. But he is at pains to state that his endnotes are often supported by contemporaneous notes and diaries, which link his story to verifiable events and the social context in which he experienced them. The Geordie dialect, which he writes with phonetics of his own devising, is clearly important to him, but, as he says, it is ‘a bugger to read’. Fortunately, he doesn’t do it all the time, and a limited glossary of words helps with translation.

His account of his runaway marriage to the youthful Maureen required a move from County Durham to more challenging mining employment in South Yorkshire, and signals an impetuosity to be found later. Photographs of his family and of Maureen suggest the support of loving relationships. More remains to be learned about the artistic, politicised Maureen, with hints of how liberated women might behave.

His work as a mineworker, even at a coal face designated for training, involved him in some of the most demanding tasks for a person of his delicate physique in an environment so hot that men worked naked but for boots, cap lamp battery belt, and helmet. His description of the technology is detailed, accurate and clear, and his determination to cope with such employment, without endorsing it as reasonable, is remarkable. He also had to cope with the bullying offered by a particularly hostile workmate. When he confronted the bully, and threatened to attack him at the throat with a compressed air pick, the bullying stopped. He also found that it had earned him the respect of the team. He recalled his father’s words; ‘The men will break your heart, son’, but observed, near the end of this first volume, that ‘It would take years and years to win the respect of these men but once it is achieved you can take it to the bank for it is like gold’.

*Christopher Gifford*

## Media Lens

**David Edwards and David Cromwell (Media Lens), *Newspeak in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Pluto Press, 304 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745328942, £55, paperback ISBN 9780745328935, £16.99**

*'Princes and priests soon saw an enemy in the press. Type was in their opinion the most serious form that lead could take ... The rich classes – otherwise the conspiring classes – shut out as far as they could all knowledge of their doings, alleging that their object was to prevent the dissemination of "heresy and immorality".'*

George Jacob Holyoake

Back in the mid-seventies, I was working for BBC television in Glasgow when a group called the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) published a book entitled *Bad News*, which covered research they had been conducting into bias in the media. It caused such a stir amongst the journalists that I worked with that it prompted me to buy a copy. The problem with the journalists was that they could not accept that the reports they turned in could in any way carry bias.

Now I have come across a book written by members of Media Lens, a group of academics and activists who encourage readers to challenge the received view of the world presented by major newspapers and broadcasters. *Newspeak in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by David Edwards and David Cromwell exposes the arrogance and servility to power of leading journalists and editors. This recalls George Orwell's proposed preface to *Animal Farm*:

*'The sinister fact about literary censorship ... is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban.'*

In the thirty-five intervening years since *Bad News*, technology has changed the ways in which news is delivered, increasing the breadth of methods of delivery from TV, radio and print medium to a whole host of electronic delivery systems which multi-millionaire media moguls have tried, with some success, to monopolise.

However, the open access of the system, its interactivity, the wide spread availability of computing power, and the ability of this capacity to be used for the analysis of news corporations' output has meant that much more sophisticated methods and more robust findings can be added to the early pioneers' headline counts and measurements of column inches.

The archiving of transcripts of reports and comments on newsworthy issues has permitted the use of sophisticated search programmes which improve research accuracy and speed. The use of e-mail to beard the offending journalists on their Blackberrys has added a new level of scrutiny to the system. Further, and as this book amply illustrates, it is possible to direct readers to the authors' sources on the internet.

An issue analysed in *Newspeak* is the Israeli operation 'Cast Lead', that began in December 2008, in which they killed 1,400 Palestinians in the ghetto called the Gaza Strip. To set the context, Edwards and Cromwell refer to a Glasgow University Media Group web page ([http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/mediagroup/media/israel\\_excerpt2.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/mediagroup/media/israel_excerpt2.pdf)). I shall not précis it except to say that it warns us that the viewer's basic knowledge of an issue should not be taken for granted.

Of great concern to the authors is the position of the BBC during this conflict, with questions as to whether it is taking sides, or has lost its spine on tricky issues. The contribution by Tim Llewellyn, the BBC's former Middle East correspondent, voices his knowledgeable apprehensions on this count ([http://www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040115\\_Ducking\\_Palestine\\_1.HTM](http://www.medialens.org/alerts/04/040115_Ducking_Palestine_1.HTM)).

Issue is taken with the distortion of language in one of Media Lens' archived reports, which forensically dissects the meanings ascribed to 'arrested' and 'kidnapped'. Ironically, this includes a piece by the BBC's reporter, Alan Johnstone, who would have had time to ponder the semantic niceties of this conundrum whilst he himself was held captive in Gaza ([http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060630\\_kidnapped\\_by\\_israel.php](http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060630_kidnapped_by_israel.php)).

In order to show that there is clear supporting evidence by official bodies for an alternative perspective, you can refer to a UN Refugee Agency report on the whole mess (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=47baaa262>).

How this was taken up by the BBC is to be found here ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7281711.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7281711.stm)).

Comment on operation Cast Lead from Seumas Milne provides support for a different perspective, and can be found in full (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/dec/30/israel-and-the-palestinians-middle-east>).

Excerpts from BBC Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen's diary of the conflict between Hamas and Israel are online ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7822048.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7822048.stm)). Bowen found himself in hot water after heavy pressure on the BBC Trust from Zionist groups, to which the Trust caved in.

And, finally, to restore faith in the human race, Noam Chomsky's article

provides a necessary antidote to our pusillanimous guardians at the state broadcasters (<http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20316>). Always remembering that lesser reporters than Bowen will have absorbed the message that the BBC's own staff cannot have confidence that the spineless BBC Trust will support them.

Media Lens has transformed the study of news media bias in that it is actively providing activists with ammunition, as foreseen by Holyoake back in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

*Henry McCubbin*

## ***Herald Angels***

**George Lansbury, *The Miracle of Fleet Street: the story of the Daily Herald*, Spokesman Books, 178 pages, paperback ISBN 9780851247663, £15.00**

This is not exactly the whole story of what, in the early 1930s, was to become Britain's biggest-selling daily newspaper. Those wishing to learn about the ferocious pre-Second World War circulation battles, or the anguished slide that saw the paper metamorphose into the short-lived IPC *Sun* before being given garish new clothes and soaring away under the control of fledgling emperor Rupert Murdoch, must look elsewhere.

Having been born in 1911 as a daily strike-bulletin when London print Unions came out for a 48-hour working week, and resurrected the following year with capital of around £300 as a co-operative Labour venture, the *Herald* had been publishing consistently for only 13 years when Labour leader-to-be Lansbury recounted its trials and tribulations – there were many – on the way to relative stability.

An editorial published on October 26, 1912 told of the campaign to put the paper on a sound financial footing and how a woman had visited the House of Commons to tell Lansbury: 'My husband has sent me with this message. "We have only saved a little, but here is £50. Do not let the *Daily Herald* die".' A Socialist parson presents a cheque for £150, while 'another man' said: 'Let the landlord go hang for his rent. I am sending it to you.' 'Was there ever a daily newspaper that had such wonderful support as we are getting?' asked the editorial.

Probably not. But never before or since has there been a similar David of a newspaper struggling against the Goliath of capitalism, on behalf of which most newsprint manufacturers later refused to supply a paper that



was pro-women's suffrage and supported both the Russian revolution and trades union strikes. Agents scoured the country to buy paper secretly.

Having been able to publish only weekly during the First World War, the *Herald* campaigned on behalf of workers both in print and with a series of rallies, another of which was planned, to support Labour and to announce that daily publication would shortly be resumed, in November 1918 at the Royal Albert Hall. Four days before the meeting, with 19,000 people having requested tickets, the Hall management cancelled the contract, citing 'demonstrations of a revolutionary nature' at previous meetings. Time for the workers of the world to unite: the Electrical Trades Union removed all the fuses from the Hall and suggested that unless permission to use it was restored the whole of Kensington might be plunged into darkness. Oh, and no trains would stop at local stations and taxi drivers would not ply for hire near the Hall. Thousands had to be turned away from the two meetings that subsequently took place.

From its very beginning the *Herald* produced challenging journalism – the headline 'Women and children last!' swiftly followed the loss of the *Titanic*, which sank and drowned more than half the children travelling in steerage as the first issue of the paper was going to press. Observed the *Herald* of the White Star Line's profits: 'They have paid 30 per cent to their shareholders and they have sacrificed 51 per cent of the steerage children.'

Most opposition papers remained hostile to the *Herald*, and after Lansbury visited Russia in 1920, Lloyd George's Government proclaimed it had evidence that diamonds brought to London by a Russian delegation had sold for between £40,000 and £50,000 and the 'Bolshevik gold' donated to the paper. The *Herald* famously insisted that 'NOT A BOND, NOT A FRANC, NOT A ROUBLE', though confirming that £75,000 had been offered and pointing out that 'if we accepted the offer from Russia (with which this country has been technically at peace since 1855 ...), we should have done nothing dishonourable and we should not be at all ashamed of ourselves'. Such intrigue, such drama; what a movie the early years of the *Herald* would make.

Lansbury, an MP and the chief shareholder early on, became editor by accident, pitchforking himself into the role for a nine-year tenure in 1913 after several predecessors had lurched from one calamity to another. 'How many more years of life remain for me, it is impossible to say,' he wrote, 'but whatever the future may be ... nothing can happen to me which will

bring me more satisfaction or more joy than the memory of these great years spent in company with, and service for, the readers and friends of the *Daily Herald*.’

The paper was owned from 1922 by the TUC and the Labour Party, with Odhams Press obtaining 51 per cent in 1929. Lansbury lived to see sales top two million in 1933 and died seven years later, long before his dreams were shattered by savage decline and the beginning of the end with the 1961 takeover by IPC, then a publishing giant dominated by Mirror Group. In republishing Lansbury’s long-neglected book – a love story encumbered only by too much detail of political skirmishes – Spokesman has restored an important chapter of newspaper and social history.

*Bill Hagerty*

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## **Iraq confidential?**

**Ron Suskind, *The Way of the World: A story of truth and hope in the age of extremism*, Pocket Books, 448 pages, paperback ISBN 9781847391506, £8.99**

This book came to my attention through Iraq Inquiry Digest\*, an informative commentary on the Iraq Inquiry, which is proceeding in London under the chairmanship of Sir John Chilcot.

*The Way of the World* is particularly interesting because it sheds just a little light on the activities of Sir Richard Dearlove, who was head of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service from 1999 to 2004, whilst the war on Iraq was being prepared and then prosecuted. Curiously, Sir Richard has not yet appeared before the Iraq Inquiry in public session, nor has there been any suggestion that he has met with Sir John or other Committee members in private. Has he not been invited to appear? Has he refused to do so? Has the Secret Intelligence Service refused him permission to testify? We simply do not know. But there is a gaping whole in the record which the Chilcot Committee is busily compiling as long as it hasn’t heard from the head of the Secret Intelligence Service. It was during his watch that Britain joined with the United States in the invasion of Iraq, and

became an occupying power in that country whilst hundreds of thousands of its people died, many of them suffering violent deaths.

It is not the case that Sir Richard eschews public exposure. Ron Suskind, prize-winning journalist and author of this intriguing read, called on him in his rooms at Pembroke College in Cambridge, where he is Master. Suskind had travelled to Cambridge to ask Dearlove about what Suskind says was a last-ditch attempt by British Intelligence to avert the war on Iraq. A contact of Suskind's in Washington had informed him that, apparently, a senior SIS officer called Michael Shipster had meetings with the head of Iraqi intelligence, beginning in Jordan in early 2003.

The Iraqi apparently told Shipster that there were no weapons of mass destruction (confirming what other another well-placed Iraqi had told the UN weapons inspectors). He explained why this was the case, and how Saddam was worried that his neighbours, especially Iran, would discover that he no longer had any such deadly weapons. Suskind continues:

'Dearlove confirms all this. Then cuts me off. "How do *you* know about Shipster's visit?" Only very few people, he mumbles, on either side of the Atlantic, know any of this ... "Yes, it did happen",' he adds.

According to Suskind, Dearlove goes on to confirm that

'Shipster's precious haul of intelligence was passed immediately, by February, to Washington. Everyone "at the top" knew all about it – he and Tenet [CIA chief], Blair, Bush, and Cheney.'

Why risk such a dangerous mission at the eleventh hour? According to Dearlove, it was an 'attempt to try, as it were, I'd say, to diffuse the whole situation ...'

Dearlove apparently travelled to Washington to brief the Americans personally on what the head of Iraqi intelligence had told Shipster about Iraq's non-existent WMD. Tenet's intuition was that they wouldn't want to hear this 'downtown'. He was right, it seems. Dearlove summarised the response in his 'conversation' with Suskind in this way:

'The problem was the Cheney crowd was in too much of a hurry, really. Bush never resisted them quite strongly enough ... Yes, it was probably too late, I imagine for Cheney ... I'm not sure it was too late for Bush ... I don't think it was too late for Bush.'

Suskind has extraordinarily good access to the top of what is nominally Britain's Secret Intelligence Service. From Cambridge he travelled to London to meet Nigel Inkster, Dearlove's number two at MI6, assistant director until 2006. Inkster is also forthcoming in his conversation with

Suskind, just as his former boss was, although he does contradict the Master of Pembroke about whether the Shipster mission was too late to avert the war. Inkster first confirms that Tahir Jalil Habbush was Shipster's contact in Iraqi intelligence. Then he goes on to say:

'You have to bear in mind that at that point the UK and the US were in very different positions. I think within the USA there was widespread resignation that this was going to go ahead ... and it was already more about preparing for the aftermath. Whereas within the UK, of course, the whole thing went right down to the wire. And everyone was trying to find a way out, if that could be done ... You know, the feeling was that this was a decision the US had made way back and, you know, that was the defining perception.' The United States was 'like a runaway train. There was nothing that was going to stop this.'

The purpose of the Shipster mission was to 'get inside Saddam's head,' according to Inkster. Suskind interprets Inkster to mean that 'It's what Blair wanted'.

Are these not extraordinary claims? There has been no mention of Shipster's mission at the Iraq Inquiry, as far as I know. Nor can his name be found in Lord Butler's *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, which was published in July 2004. Shouldn't this episode be scrutinised? Did it really happen? If so, what does it tell us about the frantic weeks during early 2003 as the armies were readied to invade Iraq, and the 'troublesome' Attorney-General was sent to Washington to 'put some steel in his spine'?

Sir John Chilcot said at the conclusion of Clare Short's memorable testimony that one of the two tasks of the Inquiry was 'to establish a reliable account of what happened from many people's different perspectives'. The second task was to 'identify serious lessons to be learned from the whole experience'. Shouldn't the Shipster mission be probed on both counts?

*Tony Simpson*

## Korea

**David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, 736 pages, Macmillan hardback ISBN 9780230709904, £25, Pan paperback ISBN 9780330458504, £9.99**

'If we just stand by, they'll move into Iran and they'll take over the whole Middle East. There's no telling what they'll do if we don't put up a fight now.'

The refrain will be familiar to students of US interventionism in the Cold War era; on this occasion, the speaker was Harry Truman, and the warning related to the North Korean crossing into the South in June 1950, an act viewed by the United States' National Security Council as a flagrant breach of the UN Charter. Perhaps rather more pertinent was the remark, attributed to the Japanese politician Rikitaro Fujisawa, that 'Korea lies like a dagger, ever pointed towards the heart of Japan'. If the North Korean leadership had hoped that the United States would regard the matter as a purely internal dispute and adopt an impassive stance, as it had done during the civil war in China, they were to be disappointed. In fact, the communist revolution in China had provided US policymakers with what they considered to be irrefutable evidence of the dangers of non-intervention. Russia had succumbed to the 'Red menace' decades earlier, but she was never believed to lie within the US sphere of influence; by contrast, as Halberstam explains, 'China was America's, and thus had been lost by America'.

The sense of a nation waking from a complacent lull is a consistent theme of this immense history of the Korean conflict. This was a conflict which shattered a number of enduring myths: the disastrous military setbacks suffered by the US in the early part of the campaign shattered the illusion that military power rested only with the richest, most technologically advanced nations, and exposed the limitations of US power barely five years after its aircraft Enola Gay and Bockscar delivered to Japan two of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's most horrific crimes against humanity, and seduced US policymakers into dreams of global omnipotence backed by nuclear might. Also destroyed was the myth that US politics stopped at the water's edge; the intensity and bitterness of the domestic political disputes, which comprise a complex and fascinating sub-plot in Halberstam's account, heralded the end of the political bipartisanship of the World War Two period.

The US involvement in Korea acted as a midwife to the National Security Council 68 (NSC 68) project of Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze. NSC 68 offered Americans a new framework for interpreting world affairs in the post-World War Two era; it defined global conflict in unequivocally ideological terms, demanding enormous budget increases for the global struggle against the Soviet Union. President Truman had been stalling over the proposed programme when the perceived imperative of Korean intervention provided a timely kick-start; the Pentagon budget quadrupled from £13 billion to £55 billion in autumn 1951, a significant shift of gear that paved the way for four decades of ideologically-driven global

interventions characterised by venal, murderous cynicism (or, if you read the newspapers, bumbling altruism).

Another common theme is the sheer incompetence of senior policymakers on both sides: ‘Every key decision on both sides,’ explains Halberstam, ‘turned on a miscalculation’: the US underestimated the skills of the North Korean troops, and overestimated how well prepared the US troops were; the US drove north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel despite Chinese warnings; MacArthur insisted on pushing his forces all the way to Yalu, convinced that the Chinese would not come in; Mao in turn had too much confidence in his soldiers’ revolutionary spirit, and pushed his troops too far south, suffering heavy losses; Stalin also miscalculated – the Russian failure to support the Chinese in the vital early months caused deep divisions which culminated in the Sino-Soviet split; Kim Il Sung miscalculated, convinced as he was that the peasants of the South would rise up in defence of a unified Korea. The ultimate beneficiaries were those in the US State Department who were intent on manipulating the communist threat for the purposes of building and consolidating a national security state. Halberstam notes that Chinese entry into the conflict ‘gave the ultimate push forward to the vision embodied in NSC 68. It greatly increased the Pentagon’s influence and helped convert the country toward more of a national security state than it had previously been.’

Perhaps inevitably, there are occasional hints at the author’s own political bias, such as Halberstam’s rather unsatisfactory appraisal of the communists’ mass appeal among rural Chinese workers (‘All they had to do was exploit the country’s myriad grievances and miseries’). In contrasting the ‘democratic’ South with the authoritarian North, Halberstam glosses over the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of the South Korean regime for much of the Cold War period. And there is the occasional stylistically and syntactically questionable form of words where the author seems to overreach himself in a bid to achieve added literary effect (‘Stalin ... would have ruled almost exactly like Kim Il Sung and survived ... till death did him part [sic].’).

This is, nonetheless, an extremely valuable book and an enjoyable read, comprehensive in its scope and thoroughly researched. In addition to meticulously analysing the domestic and international political dimensions of the conflict, Halberstam writes at length about the experiences of the soldiers who fought in it, giving *The Coldest Winter* a very welcome social dimension.

*Nathaniel Mehr*

## China

**Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State*, Cambridge University Press, 366 pages, hardback ISBN 9780521898102, £15.99**

Since the late 'seventies, the Chinese economy exploded into a phenomenal new surge of growth. This book is the latest attempt, and a very serious one, to explain why this is.

Yasheng Huang is severely orthodox: he sees economic development as resulting from private ownership, with attendant property rights, deregulation and liberalisation. He devilled his acute knowledge of the empirical basis for his judgements from intense labour among the official documents, paying special attention to the relevant documents from banks. From this perusal, he identified the complete inadequacy of a gradualist approach to the Chinese reforms. Of course, economic reforms are one thing: democratic experiments completely another. Perhaps modern China is approaching another crossroads, since the economic upswing may prove unsustainable in the absence of greater democracy.

But up to now, an impoverished countryside has fed vast reservoirs of labour into the growing towns and their industries. In Tientsin the leader of the city's trade unions explained this to me in the early 'nineties: 'We in China have an unlimited supply of cheap rural labour', he said. 'But once they are acclimatised to industrial life', I asked him, 'will they not develop larger appetites?' 'Not very quickly', he said. 'There are plenty more workers from the countryside who will wish to do their jobs if they are discontented.'

Huang argues that there are two Chinas: an entrepreneurial one in the rural areas, and a predominantly State controlled urban regime. In the 1990s, he explains, urban China asserted itself over and above its rural complement.

This book begins with a detailed synopsis, which helpfully sets out the prospectus. Huang pays special attention to the development of Shanghai, which was among the least reformed of the urban economies in the 1980s, and yet its leaders during the second half of that decade went on to dominate Chinese politics through the 1990s.

The market in China has engendered fewer new private sector businesses than generally assumed. Regulation was stricter in Shanghai than elsewhere, but the share of labour income, including the income of proprietors, was very low. Teasing through the contradictory faces of

Shanghai's development, Huang leads us to confront a reality which is frequently over-simplified in the West.

Social unrest has clearly increased in the most recent years in China, and Huang gives this his attention.

'Protests in China increased at a stunning rate. Between 1993 and 1997, the total number of demonstrations rose from 8,700 to 32,000. According to official figures released by the Ministry of Public Security, there were 58,000 large-scale incidents of unrest in 2003, 74,000 in 2004, and 87,000 in 2005. In an ominous development, in September 2007, more than 2,000 demobilised soldiers rioted simultaneously in two cities 770 miles apart from each other, indicating a high level of co-ordination.'

And so this profoundly informative book about Chinese capitalism concludes with the perception that the Chinese working class is beginning an awakening. Watch this space.

*Ken Coates*

## Cuba

**Helen Yaffe, *Ché Guevara: The Economics of Revolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, 368 pages, hardback ISBN 9780230218208, £55.00, paperback ISBN 9780230218215, £17.99**

This book covers a relatively short period of Ché Guevara's life, namely the six years he spent in the nascent revolutionary Cuban government from 1959 to 1965. The period might have been relatively short but he used it to great effect, providing the driving force for the transformation of the semi-colonial economy of Cuba and putting it firmly on the path of socialist transition. We are familiar with Ché the committed guerrilla fighter, determined to hasten Third World liberation, but we are perhaps not so aware of Ché the socio-economic theorist, banker, administrator, trade diplomat, technical innovator and industrial moderniser. Helen Yaffe has made a comprehensive and thorough effort to redress this gap in our knowledge. The book captures the enormous energy of Guevara, both in his practical and theoretical activity, and charts the reciprocal dynamism and interplay of practice and theory when he was head of the National Bank of Cuba and, later, Minister for Industry.

Guevara initially took charge of the National Bank of Cuba and wasted little time in securing Cuban gold and international currency reserves from



the clutches of the United States. The reserves being held at Fort Knox would most certainly have been impounded as Cuban-American relations plummeted. Again, to forestall any undermining of the national currency, Guevara ordered the printing of new banknotes. In the short term these measures helped to protect the Cuban economy from both internal and external enemies. In the long term, the problems faced by the Cuban economy were daunting, and the book explains these difficulties in detail. Briefly, the major problems included dependency on a sugar-producing agricultural monoculture, structurally high unemployment and underemployment, chronic rural poverty and ill-health, foreign monopoly control of many industries and resources, mass illiteracy, and the mass exodus of many of the middle-class professionals, technicians and administrators.

The main substance of the book is how Guevara dealt with these difficulties, and the theoretical premise on which he acted to ensure that, by 1961, Cuba was placed firmly on a socialist economic path, despite the US economic blockade. Of course, Cuba needed help and the Soviet bloc, and the Soviet Union in particular, was able and willing to give vital assistance, much of which was negotiated by Guevara. Negotiating these trade agreements occasioned extended visits to the Soviet bloc and also Yugoslavia, from which he was able to obtain a firm grasp of the realities of their economies. He was not impressed, realising the relative backwardness of technology in the Soviet bloc (with the exception of the defence industry) in comparison to the United States. Neither did he regard their organisational methods to be effective in comparison with what he had gleaned from reading the internal planning documents from Western Corporations that had been expropriated in Cuba. He regarded the methodology of Western corporate organisations in planning control, accountancy and, above all, cost control to be far superior to its Eastern bloc equivalent. But for Guevara there was an even greater hazard in absorbing the Soviet organisational routines, and their use of 'competition, the profit motive, material incentives, credit, and interest (expressions of the law of value)'. Guevara was to develop his own alternative to the Soviet methodology, and the conflict between these two paradigms became known as the 'Great Debate', the ramifications of which have waxed and waned through Cuban political and economic life up to the present. The 'Great Debate' and the striving to do things differently in Cuba, instigated primarily by Ché Guevara, forms the core of this book.

The 'Great Debate' coincided with additional efforts to 'liberalise' the Soviet economy and introduce some further elements of 'market socialism',

already largely operational in Yugoslavia (but there with workers' self-management). Through such changes it was hoped that the problems of economic stagnation and the continuing growth of bureaucracy could be overcome. The work of the Ukrainian academic Evsei G. Liberman gained prominence, in which it was suggested that the enterprise's drive for profit should be the gauge of productivity, not the central plan, utilising the stimulus of material incentives. There is not space to go into the intricacies of the debate, and it cannot be boiled down alone to the rivalry between moral and material incentives. The argument ranges over a number of topics: the relationship of the enterprises to each other, and their lack of control from the centre; the role of the central bank; the degree of central planning; pricing policy and the use of the law of value as propounded by Marx. Guevara became convinced that if the capitalist norms of control, those utilising the profit motive and material incentives, were applied, together with allowing relative independence for enterprises to compete, then you would see an erosion of any socialist consciousness amongst the workforce. He became convinced that what he called the 'hybrid' system adopted by the 'actual existing' socialist states would lead, eventually, to capitalist restoration, as it fostered the 'aggressive fight for profits', and detracted from the necessary 'collective consciousness' needed to foster the struggle for a socialist outcome. The debate overflowed to encompass the participation of various eminent foreign Marxists, amongst them Charles Bettelheim and Ernest Mandel, while Guevara wrote at least 20 articles on related matters in several Cuban journals and touched on the question in numerous public speeches. The debate opened up the question of 'transition economics' again, resuscitating the debates of the early years of the Bolshevik state: 'war communism', the New Economic Policy and, of course, the dogma of 'socialism in one country' all had an airing.

In outline, Guevara's policy, as laid out in his *Budgetary Finance System*, as opposed to the Soviet model of the *Auto Financing System*, is as follows:

- Workplaces of a similar industrial type were to be grouped into 'consolidated enterprises' and controlled centrally.
- These enterprises would not have funds of their own, but would use money as a unit of account to record productivity, subsequently analysed centrally.
- The National Bank would control the flow of funds to enterprises in accordance with the requirements of the National Plan.
- Moral incentives are to be of paramount importance in the long run, with material incentives necessary only in the short term.

- Every effort should be made to encourage the growth of a socialist consciousness coupled with appeals for additional voluntary labour, education of workers, and administrators should be given a high priority.
- The Law of Value will still exist but will be progressively undermined by central planning and the 'new social relations'.
- Cost control will be stressed, and increases in productivity be measured by that yardstick.
- Costs will be the criterion used to judge the success or failure of the enterprise or technique, not the pursuit of profit.
- The costs of Cuban industry will determine price, and will be compared to international prices to judge their productivity.

Yaffe's book explains much of this in detail in the context of the many factors involved, and the difficulties faced by the Cuban transitional economy, both its historical handicaps and the ever present external threats, such as the US economic blockade. The essence of Guevara's position was to persuade the Cuban workforce (and the rest of the population) to view their economic efforts through the prism of socialist consciousness, the national economy as one industry, one factory, with a collective sense of purpose.

One of the things that Yaffe's book makes clear is the incredible intellectual and physical energy of Guevara during this period, and the amazing number of activities he initiated and was involved in. In the context of 'The Great Debate' he was studying Marx's *Capital* plus many other classic Marxist texts, and other literature from east and west, which discussed market socialism. Within the Ministry of Industry he organised weekly seminars on Marx's *Capital*: starting at nine in the evening and often not finishing till the early hours, the participants included vice-ministers, advisers and invited guests. The discussions were led by Professor Anastasio Mansilla, a Soviet selected intellectual, who we can be certain got more discussion than he bargained for. Education and training were key tools in fostering moral incentives, and workers, administrators, directors of consolidated enterprises, right up to vice-ministers were encouraged to participate. Wage differentials were utilised to encourage training and a scale of eight rates, with the top rate three times the bottom rate, was employed. This concession was defended by Fidel Castro who proclaimed, 'the revolution cannot equalise incomes overnight' ... but our ... 'aspiration is to arrive at equal incomes'. The need for mass training at such a breakneck speed was in part occasioned by the skills exodus: for example, two-thirds of public accountants had left Cuba by 1961, and of the 800 who were left, virtually all were based in the Havana area. Such a

situation would, of course, make difficult the cost analysis and control which was to replace the profit motive.

Together with the drive to educate and train the workforce, Guevara encouraged workers to be both inventive and innovatory. One campaign was called 'Construct Your Own Machine', and another initiated a 'Committee for Spare Parts', as a response to the increasing difficulties caused by the American blockade. Consultation, management, participation and inspection are dealt with comprehensively in one chapter, which also deals with the 'Plan of Demotion'. This was a scheme by which the top echelons of enterprises and the central senior administrators, such as vice ministers, would take, temporarily for a month, a subordinate role at least one level down from their full-time position. By this measure Guevara hoped to prevent the growth of élitism and bureaucracy, and to impart knowledge of the difficulties faced by subordinates. Production assemblies within enterprises were held on a regular basis, in order to 'audit the work of their administration'. They were chaired by elected workers. The purpose was to ensure that management was doing its job. Committees for Local Industry were brought into existence to ensure localised coordination and to solve problems at the local level. Finally, Guevara was to initiate research committees into computerisation (in Cuba, in 1961, there were two computers only), automation and cybernetics, and a whole host of practical scientific areas in some of which Cuba was later to excel.

This is an important and interesting book, one could almost say exciting, which is quite an achievement for a work on economics. An awful lot of ground is covered, much of it of relevance to what went wrong with the Soviet experience, and it is also instructive concerning the dangers facing any nation attempting to escape from the tentacles of global capitalism. There is perhaps another book that needs to be written, in the light of those first formative years, continuing the story from Guevara's laudable efforts up to the present situation in Cuba. A perhaps inadequate attempt is made at the end of the book to draw conclusions as to the long-term significance of Guevara's involvement, and its effect on Cuba's economy. There are signs that the strains of the 'special period', whilst largely overcome, have left deep scars, particularly amongst younger Cubans. Does this mean a change of direction towards the further use of market mechanisms? The future of Cuba and the move to the left throughout Latin America is one of the more hopeful signs that might yet put socialism back on the global agenda. It would be unthinkable to lose it.

*John Daniels*

**Russia**

**Stephen F. Cohen, *Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: from Stalinism to the new Cold War*, Columbia University Press, 328 pages, hardback ISBN 9780231148962, £19.50**

Stephen Cohen's book provides a fascinating study of some of the key turning-points and controversies in the evolution of the Soviet Union until the ultimate break-up in the early 1990s. The analysis continues with an examination of the subsequent relations between Russia and the United States.

The author is exceptionally well qualified to conduct such a study. He is an American scholar who spent much time in the Soviet Union, studied many original sources of information, and interviewed leading personalities. He is the Professor of Russian Studies and History at New York University and Emeritus Professor of Politics at Princeton University. His book is not a partisan tract in a cold war. He has much to say that is original.

His book, as suggested by its title, studies the alternatives that faced the Soviet leadership at various times since the death of Lenin. The author demonstrates that the choices made had a profound impact on the course of Soviet history.

The opening chapter deals with the ideas and role of Bukharin, the youngest of the top leadership around Lenin at the time of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. He was barely 29 years old when the Bolsheviks took power. The author describes him as the most genuinely popular and, perhaps, the most interesting intellectual of the Communist Party leadership that forged the new Soviet state during the years of revolution and civil war from 1917 to 1921. He did not always agree with Lenin, who sometimes criticised his point-of-view and lack of dialectics. Nevertheless, Lenin held him in high esteem, describing him as the 'favourite of the entire Party'.

In 1921 Lenin initiated what was known as the New Economic Policy to overcome the devastation of civil war and foreign intervention. Alongside state-owned industries, banks and transport the Soviet leadership encouraged small-scale private enterprise in agriculture, distribution and sections of manufacture. After Lenin's death, differences emerged in the top leadership of the Communist Party about the New Economic Policy. Bukharin was one of its principal defenders. He also argued for a programme of socialist humanism.

Towards the end of the 1920s, Stalin initiated rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation. His contention was that these changes were essential to accelerate socialist construction and to strengthen the Soviet Union against the ever-present threat of foreign intervention and hostility. The nominal argument was that collectivisation in agriculture should be conducted voluntarily. In reality there was often coercion, leading to a fall in production and hardship. Bukharin was strongly critical of the changes and continued to support the concepts of the NEP.

By 1929 Bukharin was stripped of most of his leadership positions, though he remained as editor of the newspaper, *Izvestia*, until his arrest in 1937. He was put on trial in 1938 and executed. He was the victim of a purge, initiated by Stalin, which affected hundreds of thousands – perhaps more – of Soviet citizens.

Many years later, in 1988, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ‘rehabilitated’ Bukharin, and tributes were paid to his memory. The words of Bukharin in a letter to his wife on the eve of his arrest, when he knew that he would be executed, are among the most haunting in the history of the international movement. He wrote:

‘You should know, comrades, that there is also my drop of blood on the banner which you will carry on your triumphant march to communism.’

Bukharin’s ideas were to find favour many years later in the changes made by Gorbachev, not only in economic policy, but also in his commitment to human rights. Similarly, Bukharin may also have influenced the economic policy of the Chinese Communist Party after the death of Chairman Mao. The Chinese leadership accepted that market forces and private ownership had a place in socialist development, providing always that the ultimate control of the economy rested with public influence and ownership.

A dramatic turning-point in Soviet history was, of course, the denunciation by Khrushchev, in 1956, of Stalin’s political repression. Khrushchev was not, however, without his own ‘skeletons in the cupboard’. He had been associated with repressive measures and his style of leadership was erratic. The full potential of the changes that his presence might suggest were not fully realised.

In 1964, Khrushchev was dismissed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Some of the leadership did not share his constant criticism of the Stalin period, and pointed to the economic progress that had been made, and the role of Stalin in the mobilisation of the Soviet Union to bring about the defeat of the German invasion in the Second World War. Others criticised Khrushchev’s erratic

behaviour, his failures in economic policy, and his dismissive attitude towards collective leadership.

The period of Brezhnev's leadership, following the downfall of Khrushchev, is described by Stephen Cohen as an era of 'conservatism'. The role of Stalin in the victory of the Second World War was emphasised, and many of Khrushchev's policies were criticised. Brezhnev was, however, not without his critics. The economy, it was said, was stagnating.

The next major turning point in the evolution of the Soviet Union was the emergence of Gorbachev as leader of the CPSU in the middle of the 1980s. This was no accident of succession. One of his predecessors, Andropov, was an able leader and a reformer, but he died before his full influence could be felt.

Gorbachev, on becoming General Secretary of the CPSU, changed many of the policies of the Brezhnev era. Beginning in 1987, more than one million victims of earlier purges were officially 'rehabilitated'. They included not only Bukharin but also many other Soviet leaders who had been purged and executed.

Stephen Cohen describes Gorbachev's contribution as Soviet leader in sympathetic terms. He sought to transform the authoritarian political system and to foster democratic change; he recognised that there was a role for market forces in a socialist state; he sought to change a Moscow dominated union of states into an authentic federation; and he sought to contribute towards ending the 'Cold War'. He also emphasised his commitment to 'human values'.

Another prominent member of the Soviet leadership during this period was often described in the West as a rival of Gorbachev who wanted to restore a more traditional style of Soviet leadership. Stephen Cohen describes him in more sympathetic terms. Ligachev was ten years older than Gorbachev, and his work spanned many years of the history of the Soviet Union. He was proud of his own role and of many others in earlier years in building the USSR and contributing to the defeat of fascism. Ligachev was also an admirer of the earlier leader, Andropov.

Despite his many achievements Gorbachev did not maintain his leadership in the reformed Soviet Union. He was followed by Boris Yeltsin, who was a very different individual in every way. Yeltsin had risen through the ranks of the CPSU, but his years of power marked the ultimate eclipse of Russia as any kind of socialist state.

Many of the people around Yeltsin saw their possession of political influence as a passport to the private ownership of resources and productive enterprises. Capitalism was restored on a grand scale, and the

new 'oligarchs' accumulated immense wealth. Millions of Russian people suffered a fall in living standards. Some of the new 'oligarchs' of capitalism flaunted their wealth abroad through the purchase of expensive property, foreign enterprises and football clubs.

But this was not the final swing of the political pendulum. In the year 2000 a former KGB officer became the Russian President. His name was Putin. He is still with us, though now as Prime Minister. He is an able man and, though not a communist, he shares the pride of millions of Russians that the previous socialist state had achievements to its credit as well as grave injustices. Despite all the difficulties, the USSR became one of the world's two super-powers, and it played a decisive role in the defeat of fascism in the Second World War. Putin appears to maintain his popularity. Stephen Cohen is of the view that the United States could have done more, and could still do more, to improve relations with Russia.

This is a book to be read not only by specialists in history but also by the general reader. It deserves success.

*J. E. Mortimer*

## Rodchenko

**John Milner, *Design: Rodchenko*, Antique Collectors' Club, 96 pages, hardback ISBN 9781851495917, £12.50**

Alexander Mikhailovich Rodchenko died in 1956, in his sixty-seventh year, three years after Stalin. He left an extraordinary body of work, which gives a striking impression of the changing ambitions of the Soviet Union as it struggled through the decades following the revolution in Russia of October 1917.

This handsome little volume focuses mainly on Rodchenko's graphic work, in the form of book jackets, posters and labelling for food and drink, all reproduced in glorious colour. These items tell their own stories. There is the cover of Mayakovsky's poem *Syphilis*, with its ghostly photographic negative of a person's head, which was published in Tiflis in 1927 in an edition of 5,000 copies. During the 1920s, Rodchenko's elegant lettering proclaimed the works of Ehrenburg, Aseev, Mayakovsky and other writers who gave their support to the revolution. But life was becoming even harder as the 1920s advanced, and Stalin established himself. In 1930, Mayakovsky committed suicide.

Rodchenko persevered, and his work during the 1930s reflects the



increasing industrialisation of the Soviet Union, which built the tanks and aircraft that also figure extensively in his graphic output during the worst years of Stalin's purges. Yet, even during those dark times, there were notable flashes of creativity. In 1935, Rodchenko and his future wife, Varvara Stepanova, produced the stunning fold-out parachute illustration for the twelfth number of *USSR in Construction*. Printers must have cursed the specification, but this is one of the unforgettable images of the pre-war period.

John Milner, visiting professor at London's Courtauld Institute of Art, contributes a scholarly and informative commentary on Rodchenko's signal contribution to design. Following the recent landmark exhibition at the Tate Modern, *Rodchenko and Popova: Defining Constructivism* (see *Spokesman 105*), the creative imagination of Soviet pioneers reaches out to new generations.

*Tony Simpson*

## Apartheid Again

**Ben White, *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide*, Pluto Press, 144 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745328881, £30, paperback ISBN 9780745328874, £9.99**

Recent times have taught us two very important things about Israel-Palestine. On the political level and in the high sphere of the international community, Israel remains untouchable. The self-proclaimed Jewish State enjoys an impunity rarely seen in history.

Its aggression against the people of Gaza was one of the bloodiest and most ruthless in the long list of Israel's attacks on the Palestinians. Numerous inquiries by well respected organisations such as Amnesty International, *B'Tselem* (The Israeli Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), and Human Right Watch have demonstrated that the Israeli army deliberately targeted civilians, buildings and infrastructure. It bombed schools, mosques, a media centre, and UN infrastructure. Civilians were shot at while waving white flags, paramedics were maimed while picking up dead bodies in the street, white phosphorous was used in civilian areas, and Israeli soldiers testified that they had been given *carte blanche* for three weeks.

In spite of such clear violations of international human rights law and the Geneva Conventions, not one Western state came to the rescue of the

Palestinians. Subsequently, most European countries either abstained or voted against the implementation of the very thorough and balanced Goldstone Report on the Gaza Conflict during a vote at the UN General Assembly. To make matters worse, a new trade deal was struck on agricultural products between Israel and the European Union.

Even the normally powerful United States, under a new, so-called dovish administration, had to back down on its demand that settlement (the word ‘colony’ is actually more appropriate) building should be halted before any peace negotiations could resume between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

On the other hand, public opinion inclines more and more towards the Palestinians and screams for justice. The gap between the peoples and their governments is huge, and is getting bigger every day. For most people, the Gaza massacre was a step too far. Huge demonstrations took place in most capital cities around the world. A hundred thousand people turned up in London in freezing temperatures, half a million demonstrated in Turkey, ten thousand chanted peace slogans in Tel Aviv. People demonstrated outside the BBC offices in London for its biased reporting of the massacre, MPs were swamped with letters of protest, fund-raising took place in community halls, churches and workplaces, and membership of Palestine solidarity groups went through the roof.

On the street, people started to ask themselves some very tough questions: ‘Have we been lied to for so many years about such a crucial issue? Is the media working hand in hand with our government? Are we only free as long as we do what our government tells us? What is really happening in the Middle East?’

It is in this context that Ben White’s book, *Israeli Apartheid*, came out. The sub-title of the book, ‘*A Beginner’s Guide*’, is somehow too modest a description. This book works on very different levels and can touch a very wide range of people, knowledgeable or not about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

To start with, Ben White gives a very brief and understandable history of the conflict from the birth of the Zionist movement. After a few pages it becomes clear that this conflict and its making are in fact not that complicated and pretty easy to understand. The myth that ‘this conflict has been going on for thousands of years and is too complicated to understand or be solved’ quickly falls apart.

Ben White could not have done it better. To explain the present, and to make sure people not familiar with the subject grab the whole story, it was crucial to give a to-the-point and brief historical analysis.

The author then moves quickly through the years and, chapter by chapter, covers all the major topics related to Israel-Palestine: Israel as a colonialist project; the Nakba of 1948 when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes; the refugee problem; the war of 1967 and the second Palestinian forced exile; the occupation of Palestinian territories; the building of the wall; the Palestinian minority inside Israel and, finally, the solidarity movement and what can be done to bring justice to the Palestinians.

By examining those topics and writing about them in a very simple, non-academic vocabulary, Ben White succeeds in making this book accessible to all audiences. In 144 pages, the author breaks down myth after myth. The Israelis claim that, in 1948, the Palestinians fled because the Arab armies ordered them to do so. How, then, can they explain that 50 per cent of the 700,000 Palestinians who fled had already gone by May 1948, when the war started? The Israelis claim that the disproportionate violence used during the second intifada was in response to Palestinian attacks. How, then, can they explain that, if the first Palestinian attack did not occur before November 2000, they had, in October, already deployed helicopter gunships, tanks, high velocity bullets and missiles?

The last part of *Israeli Apartheid* is dedicated to activism, and what we can do as citizens. This is very well done and, with the help of a thorough series of questions and answers, the author makes things easy for anyone who would like to get involved in the United Kingdom or on the ground in Israel-Palestine, complete with addresses and websites of organisations working for a just peace.

*Israeli Apartheid* is a vital tool for anyone who wants to understand the Palestine question better, to get involved in the struggle for *Adalah* ('justice' in Arabic), or simply to brush up their knowledge of the situation.

A very useful book indeed.

*Frank Barat*

## **Yugoslavia's Destruction**

**Diana Johnstone, *Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, Nato and Western Delusions*, Pluto Press, 2002, 320 pages, paperback ISBN 9780745319506, £15.99**

The Nato attack on Serbia in March 1999 could, *mutatis mutandis*, be as fateful for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the Austrian attack on Serbia in August 1914 was for the 20<sup>th</sup>. It marked Nato's change from a defensive to an aggressive

organisation, as advocated by US strategists in the early 1990s. It provided precedents for aggressive war; population expulsions under a Nato protectorate (together with the US/Nato-supported Krajina genocide); ‘coercive bombing’ of civilian facilities; and a mendacious propaganda campaign, including the use of a forged document, of a type previously seen only in totalitarian states. These precedents were soon followed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon.

Several of the war’s architects hold important posts in the Obama Administration. In Britain, the main political parties and the press unquestioningly embraced the Blairite ethic that the United States and its allies had a right and a duty to ignore international law and the dismal history of ‘humanitarian’ war, and invade (unfriendly) states where ‘human rights abuses’ were occurring, to impose democracy and modernisation. Nato policies were not defended by rational arguments on their likely consequences (there were warnings that they would lead to genocide and a ‘gangster state’) but by denouncing critics as ‘appeasers’. There have been no second thoughts. In contrast to many critical books on Iraq, very few on Kosovo have been published – and they have effectively been censored by not being reviewed.

All this justifies a review of Johnstone’s book, even though it was published in 2002, and is not in a second edition with a Postscript (*cf.* the Postscript in [www.caseagainstnato.co.uk](http://www.caseagainstnato.co.uk)). Johnstone’s aim is to put the war in perspective and examine aspects which have been distorted or neglected – specifically the responsibility for the war; the various nationalisms in Yugoslavia; Nato’s support for Albanian nationalism; the ‘victors’ justice’ of war crimes prosecutions; and the role of Germany.

Johnstone begins by pointing out a remarkable divergence between myth and reality. The myth is that the United States has upheld peace, freedom and democracy. The reality is a long history of military interventions with disastrous consequences for the countries involved. In the century before 1939, the USA continually intervened in Latin America, imposing harsh colonial rule or – more usually – supporting friendly dictators. During the Cold War, as well as Vietnam, there were dozens of ‘covert operations’ in Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia, often with British support, which brought to power or supported mass-murderous dictators, or fomented civil wars. The collapse of the Soviet Union saw the extension of military intervention to Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Johnstone brings out the complex mixture of *realpolitik*, hypocrisy and misconceptions underlying US policy on Yugoslavia. Even during the

Bosnian war, some Democratic analysts supported the dismantling of Yugoslavia, and the creation of a Moslem-dominated Bosnia, as the first step in establishing US leadership of an arc of Moslem states stretching from the Balkans through Turkey to the Gulf, a new Ottoman Empire. This interpretation makes subsequent US policy in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq consistent and rational, on its terms, rather than the product of ignorance and the tendency to reduce complex problems to 'good guys versus bad guys'. However, it is hard to believe that people such as Madeleine Albright were quite so Machiavellian. In Western Europe, most journalists simply canonised the Bosnian Moslems, ethnic Albanians, and Croats, and blamed the Serbs for everything. Any mention of the massacres of Serbs in World War Two, Izetbegovic's Islamic fundamentalism and denunciation of multinationalism, or anything that questioned sole Serb responsibility for the conflict, was taboo.

Johnstone's general argument – for which she makes a good case – is that the US/Nato objective in Yugoslavia was not to ensure peace or freedom but to extend American (and, in a small way, German) influence. She does not mention Camp Bondsteel, the largest US airbase outside the United States, the construction of which was begun as soon as US troops entered Kosovo, and which could only have been achieved by secession and war. She points out that a genuinely multinational state has been replaced by hostile, fascistic/nationalistic mini-states, and sometimes suggests that Yugoslavia could have been held together. The savagery displayed by all parties makes this doubtful, but a break-up could certainly have been organised in a less destructive way. In Kosovo, the problem (like that of Ireland in 1920) was a 'dual minority' problem, and a solution needed to take account of the interests of the Kosovan Serbs, Serbia and Macedonia, as well as those of the ethnic Albanians. Johnstone shows, with chapter and verse, that US/Nato policy was simply to back the KLA and provide pretexts for war.

The book is a series of essays rather than a chronological account. There are discussions of the history of Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, for which some background knowledge is desirable, and a chilling account of the historical basis of German determination to destroy Yugoslavia (a First World War song 'Serbia must die' was revived). Johnstone does not mention an indispensable book by a German 'insider', General Loquai's *Der Kosovo-Konflikt; Wege in einmem vermiedbaren Krieg* (The Kosovo conflict; the path to an avoidable war). There is an examination of one-sided Western reporting, and the successful PR campaigns by the breakaway nations, including some striking examples of deliberate

fabrications and some less conclusive general discussion. Johnstone's valid argument that all parties committed atrocities, and that those by Croats and Moslems were often ignored, is weakened by her glossing over of atrocities demonstrably committed by the Bosnian Serbs.

Nuggets of incisive factual evidence are interspersed with discursive and sometimes repetitive passages, so that the book is not always an easy read. Nevertheless, it is a seminal work on the Yugoslav tragedy. The bellicose columnists of the liberal British press should be forced to read it.

*Graham Hallett*

## Civilisation

**Stephen Chan, *The End of Certainty: Towards a New Internationalism*, Zed Books, 320 pages, hardback ISBN 9781848134034, £17.99**

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to analyse Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* as part of a Master's degree. Because of this I was drawn to the cover of Professor Stephen Chan's book: 'Forget ... Samuel Huntington', it shouts at you, from a pure red background. Whilst reading this book, I did.

Stephen Chan doesn't just assess what Huntington meant in his lecture of 1992. (Later, in 1996, it was expanded into a book, in response to Fukuyama's *The End of History*). He gently asks deeper questions such as what is a Civilisation, and how can we live together with other Civilizations so different from our own?

Chan's philosophy in *The End of Certainty* takes a step back from Huntington's 'clash', in order to investigate the complex history of civilisation. This enables him to present his New Internationalism.

In his *Preface*, Chan tells us he was advised 'not to write this book', but I, together with most other reviewers, am very pleased he did. The complex set of philosophical essays from chapter to chapter takes the reader on a journey across continents and cultures, through centuries of history and mythology, to the Gods and back. We are educated in Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, the Mahabharata, The Book of Job, Alexander the Great, King Solomon, the Illiad, the myth of Oedipus, African novels, Eritrea, and the videogame Assassin's Creed. The list could go on. However, Chan's book isn't so much a history of the world, as a carefully considered examination of different cultures and past civilizations and their relation to us today. As Chan argues, the 'fusing [of]

different strands of Western, Eastern, religious and philosophical thought is far more likely to help us understand and move forward amidst uncertainty.’

The New Internationalism propounded in the title requires both Eastern and Western civilizations to morph slightly to accommodate one another. In Chapter 9, *Transcendence and Power*, Chan introduces the Swiss academic and Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan. The latter ‘refers to Islam as a “European religion”, [and] calls equally for a “European Islam”’ (p. 241). Chan, through his reference to Ramadan, seems to be suggesting that if Huntington’s ‘clashing’ cultures allow themselves to learn a little about each other then, perhaps, the different ideas in each could drive both cultures forward together.

Chan ends his book with an example of his proposed alteration in civilization – Alexander the Great. The ancient King of Macedon created one of the largest empires in history by immersing himself in the ‘learning that surrounded him in the lands he conquered’ (p. 305). For Chan he was given the title ‘Great because he went forth to conquer – then gave himself up to be conquered by new ideas and cultures, finally achieving a location within them where he helped them form the debates that took those cultures forward’ (p. 305).

This is an ambitious work, and a fabulous and challenging read. I sincerely recommend it to all.

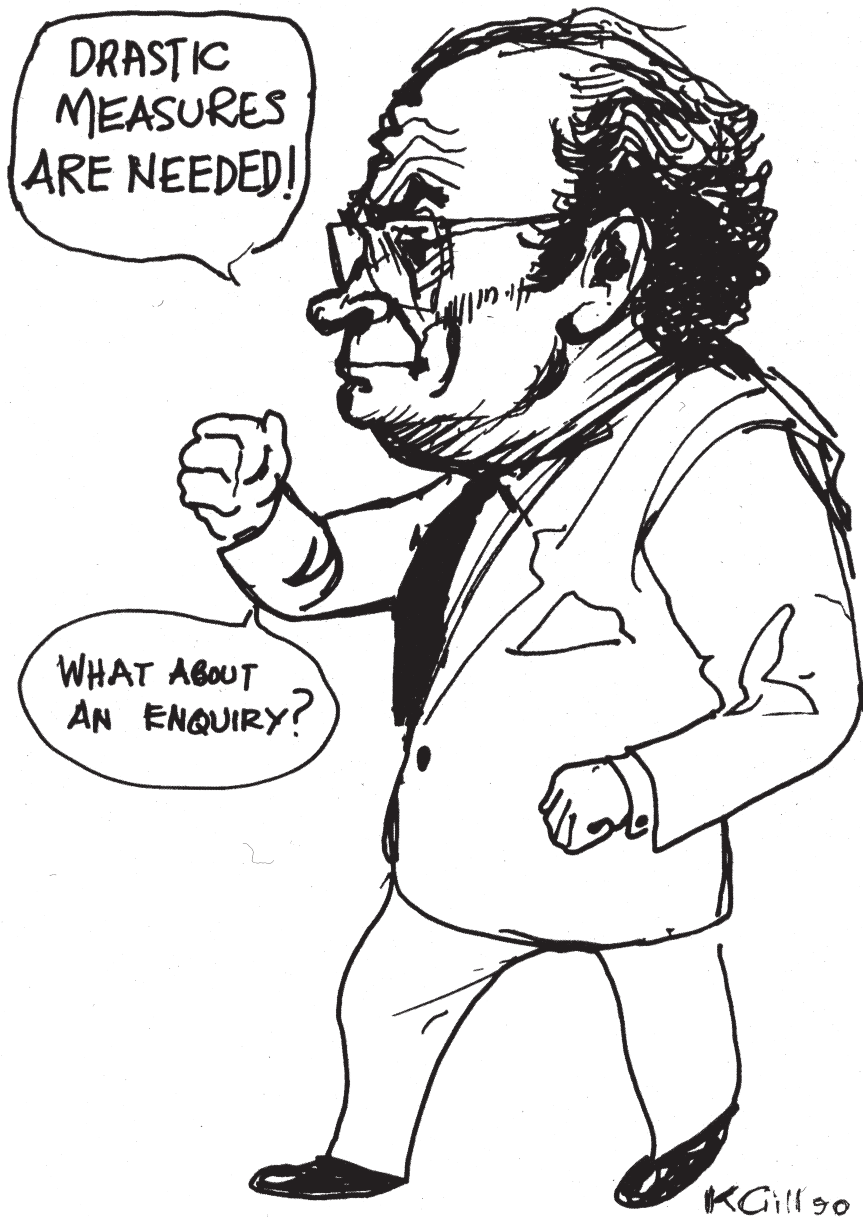
*Abi Rhodes*

## Drawn

**Ken Gill, *Hung, Drawn and Quartered: The caricatures of Ken Gill*, edited by John Green and Michal Bończa, Artery Publications, paperback ISBN 9780955822827, £12**

This collection of caricatures apparently owes its title to a remark made by Rodney Bickerstaff at Ken Gill’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Congress House: ‘we all know Ken was good at drawing and there were a number of trade union leaders who would have loved to see Ken drawn too, but only after he’d been hung and quartered!’ We reproduce two of our favourites from this handsome collection of more than 50 drawings, which comes complete with commentaries.

*TS*



*Ron Todd by Ken Gill*