

Reviews

Was Tito One of the Greats?

Geoffrey Swain, *Tito: A Biography*, I.B.Tauris, 2011, 232 pages, hardback ISBN 9781845117276, £59.50

It so happens that I met Tito on one occasion, an official reception in Belgrade in 1946, to which I was invited as the Executive Assistant to Mihail Sergeichic, the Chief of the Yugoslav Mission of UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). I introduced myself and my wife to be, who was with me. She was a doctor who had worked in hospitals in Italy treating wounded Yugoslav Partisan soldiers before we could enter Yugoslavia. For this work she had been awarded the Tito medal, which she wore under the lapel of the jacket of her uniform. The pin of the medal showed through on the outside of the lapel, and Tito bent the lapel over to reveal it. He smiled, and said in Serbo-Croat, 'Very good; thank you dearly,' and passed on to the next guest. I tell this story, not as self-aggrandisement, but to make a point about Tito's character. He was not only a very brave and thoughtful man, but quite exceptionally concerned with human relationships, especially, I must add, female ones, and my-wife-to-be was strikingly good-looking.

This book is one of a series on post-1945 Communist leaders, written by academics; this one by the Glasgow University Professor of Russian and East European Studies. It is not in any way a rounded biography of the man, but an interesting study of Tito's disagreements with Stalin, his attempts to work with Khrushchev, and his commitment to a form of Socialism based on the needs and interests of ordinary working people like Tito himself, in his upbringing as a skilled mechanic.

From my point of view, the book misses very much of importance in Tito's life. There is scant reference to his successful war-time collaboration with the British Military Mission to Yugoslavia, there is not a word about the role of UNRRA in the relief and rehabilitation of Yugoslavia after war-time destruction, which Tito's relations with the British made possible, and almost no recognition of Tito's important role in the creation, after 1968, of the 'non-aligned powers' as a response to the Soviet and Western Blocs, and nothing about the launching of the world-wide 'Round Tables' held in Cavtat.

These omissions greatly weaken the book, and we should still rely on Phyllis Auty's biography and Steven Pavlovich's *Reassessment*, together with Stephen Clissold's documents and Milovan Djilas's writings, all of

which Swain draws on very heavily. The success of Tito in rallying resistance to the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia was recognised, after two or three years, by the Allies who began to drop supplies to the Partisans and not to the Chetniks, representatives of the exiled government in London and their General Mihailovich. By 1944, at the time of the landings in France, Churchill informed the House of Commons that ‘the Partisans’ guerrilla army of over a quarter of a million men were holding in check fourteen of the twenty German divisions in the Balkan peninsula in addition to six Bulgarian divisions and other satellite forces – which could otherwise have been supporting the German resistance to the Allies in France. Geoffrey Swain makes no mention of this.

In internal affairs, Swain’s discussion of Tito’s quandaries about combining political control of social development with economic freedom, for workers in their unions to manage their own businesses, is interesting, and these problems have a relevance far beyond Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 70s. The key question relates to investment funds. Too much freedom for workers to draw on these gives to particular businesses and regions excessive resources at the expense of the country as a whole. Too little freedom discourages workers from increasing productivity and developing new opportunities. The Soviet system gave too little; the central bureaucracy decided everything. The Yugoslav experiments with workers’ self management tended to give too much freedom, and when this had to be reduced, successful businesses and regions complained bitterly.

Tito had to exercise a continuous balancing act in his rule between the Soviet style bureaucrats led by the Serb, Alexander Rankovic, often referred to as ‘right-wing’, and the workers’ control enthusiasts led by the Slovene, Edvard Kardelj, referred to as ‘left-wing’. The balance was the more difficult to maintain because of the different interests of the several national states of the Yugoslav federation. Slovenia and Croatia in the north and west were relatively rich; Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia in the south relatively poor. Serbia stood in the middle in both wealth and geography. The southern states needed, and at first received, considerable subsidies from the centre. It is a great weakness in Swain’s book that, in the lengthy discussion of Croatian separatism, this difference in wealth is not recognised, nor the fact that the gap between rich and poor widened over time, as world prices for the products from the north, mainly manufactures, improved, while world prices of raw materials, the chief products of the south, declined.

The separate nationalist tendencies in Croatia reached a crisis point in the 1970s when Tito had to use the full powers of the League of Communists

to discipline Croatian officials and their supporters, particularly among the professors and students at the university of Zagreb. They had the support also of some Belgrade professors and the magazine *Filosofia*.

Tito had hoped at different stages to find support for Yugoslavia's form of socialism in the revolts in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia, but both were put down by Soviet military intervention. Tito's work for a world non-aligned bloc attracted support in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This was the so-called Bandung Pact, based on a first meeting in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, attended by Tito, Nasser, Nehru and representatives of 29 other countries. Bandung remained as a symbol of Tito's commitment to a form of social development that was neither American capitalist nor Soviet communist. His travels around the world established him arguably as one of the great figures of the Twentieth Century, along with Roosevelt, Churchill, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Mandela.

Toward the end of Tito's life in September 1976, a conference was organised by the Yugoslav League of Communists in the Croat resort of Cavtat, drawing on contributors from many countries to found a movement called 'Socialism in the World'. 'Round Table' meetings, as they were called, were held every year in Cavtat, and a journal carrying all the contributions was published. I was able to attend many of the annual meetings until they ended in 1988. In bringing together leading socialist writers from the whole world, including the Soviet Union and China and other Communist lands, Tito's legacy was kept alive.

The break-up of Yugoslavia during the 1990s cannot seriously be attributed to Tito's policies. The absence of political democracy to be combined with economic democracy made Yugoslavia particularly prone to separatism, but it was the intervention of outside powers – Germany in Croatia, the United States in Bosnia, and NATO in Serbia that destroyed Yugoslavia, as I have argued in my 2005 book, *From Tito to Milosevic* (Merlin Press).

For the rest of Tito's life – he lived until 1980 – he maintained his position of head of state and party, with the full use of his several residencies, but increasingly surrounded, according to Geoffrey Swain, by yes-men, and holding to a Leninist, if not Stalinist, view of the dominant role of the League of Communists. On the other hand, before he died, Tito established a rotating system among the several republics of Yugoslavia for the leading position of head of state and party. It was a major concession, and should have settled the matter in a democratic fashion, but for foreign intervention.

Mrs Harriman, wife of Averell Harriman, the US ambassador to the Soviet Union under President Roosevelt and at one time US representative

in Yugoslavia, recalled in her memoirs that Tito confessed, in the late 1970s, that ‘Apres moi le deluge!’ I often wished that I had found out from her whether it was said with a straight face or with a twinkle in those pale blue eyes. In talking to Phyllis Auty, in October 1968, Tito said, ‘I have tried to devote my life to the good of the people and the country’. It is quite unjustified, in my view, that Geoffrey Swain should end his biography on a sour note; that ‘Tito failed to recognise that it was time to end the dictatorship’. It was, but he was too old to do it. It could have been left to his followers, but most of them, unfortunately, fell to the blandishments and armed intervention of foreign powers.

Michael Barratt Brown

Unslain

Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, the true origins of the financial crisis and the future of the world economy*, Zed, 2011, 264 pages, paperback ISBN 9781780320144, £12.99

As the world economy spirals into deeper crisis, one sometimes wonders how distant generations, perhaps in three or four millennia (and, of course, ecological or other apocalypse permitting) might perceive the ideas that precipitated this current situation. What strange cult required the worship of ‘free markets’ through the sacrifice of human needs? What set of exotic beliefs required huge tribute to the priesthood of the idolatry of money while those who cater for the health and wellbeing of the overwhelming population of society became increasingly submerged in deepening impoverishment? These fancies run through my head as the latest report of bankers’ bonuses is discussed on the radio playing in the background. The thoughts are, however, framed by reading this book by Yanis Varoufakis, a Greek economist attempting to understand the current economic crisis through an exploration of the longer term development of global capitalist economy.

While Varoufakis’ analysis ranges across the history of capitalism, and its periodic crises, an important question around which the book is framed concerns the capacity of the US economy to remain hegemonic after the collapse of Bretton Woods and the post-war economic consensus in the early 1970s; the ‘balanced disequilibrium’ of continuing US hegemony following withdrawal from the gold standard of the dollar in 1971. For the first time, such global power was held, not by the producer of the world’s surplus, but by the consumer of the world’s surpluses. This appropriated

surplus has then been used to fund the US – and by proxy the UK – in spiralling deficits. It is here that the book gets its title, metaphorically linking the rush of world tribute to Wall Street with the human sacrifices to the half-bull, half-man of Cretan mythology. The story of recent global economy, therefore, becomes:

‘... a tale of unbalanced might stabilized and sustained by one-sided tribute; of a hegemonic power projecting its authority across the seas, and acting as custodian of far-reaching peace and international trade in return for regular tribute that keep the beast within.’ (p. 25)

The book is framed around the emergence and decline of the ‘global minotaur’, and presents a clear and very readable account of the background to the ‘2008 moment’ of the banking crash. It is, in fact, the rewriting of a more technical thesis in political economy – *Modern Political Economy*¹ – by Varoufakis and colleagues successfully transformed into a very readable account for a wider and more general audience than academic economists.

With backward glimpses of the enclosure of land and other factors in the emergence of capitalism, and the drive for commodification, the inherent problem with capitalism, against other modes of production, is that it requires payment of wages before realisation of the product, indicating the growing importance of the finance sector. The significance of Wall Street, and its satellite in the City of London, is shown to grow in importance in the Twentieth Century following the power of the new mass production industries. Post-war US global policy became buttressed by their support for the economic development of Germany at the centre of the European Union in the West, and of Japan, as default for China, lost to revolution early in the process, in the East. The flaw in the post-war settlement – for Varoufakis as it was for John Maynard Keynes – was the absence of a global recycling mechanism which would allow trade imbalances to be held in check, a problem which was to reappear for the EU and the euro four decades after it had caused the collapse of Bretton Woods and the dollar gold standard. Capable of capturing the inflows of financial tribute, the audacious outcome of US policy makers led to the financialization explosion with, effectively, the privatization of money in the creation of newer and more exotic products inflating the bubble. Any growth in US economy following 1971 came from the extension and expansion of credit rather than any real economic improvement; and as many recent commentators have indicated, the imagination of financial institutions was increasingly focused on masking the fact that risky credit was increasingly

extended through such loans instruments as collateralised debt obligations.

There are limits to the metaphor. Varoufakis is an excellent guide through the labyrinth of modern political economy, clearly linking the post-2008 period to the longer dynamic and periodic crises of capitalism without the cataclysmic or dogmatic tenor of many such works. But there was no Theseus to slay the minotaur; the 2008 banking crisis may have wounded the beast, but did not kill it. The Global Minotaur may have been ‘critically wounded’ (p 21) but perhaps the inference from Varoufakis, that this is likely terminal, was an understandable misdiagnosis. The beast has proved much more dogged than anyone might have thought only a year or two ago. In fact, rather than anyone rendering the death blow, the main efforts have been to attempt to heal the beast so that it may emerge stronger than before.

Varoufakis is weakest in attempting to articulate the possible alternatives. What is certainly noticeable is that there has been no alternative articulated within the hegemonic powers. In the crisis following the crash of 1929, to which 2008 is often compared, we see the expression of Keynesian views as the very emergent orthodoxy which was to create the foundation for the Global Minotaur. Neo-liberalism, the post-1971 orthodoxy, remains intact and, unfortunately, echoing some distant sentiments, there appears no alternative. It is only the ‘occupy’ movement, which has sprung from the bowels of the global labyrinth, that has appeared to challenge this shoring up. From outside of the orthodoxy – of economics and the Left – and reflecting the scream of the global underbelly, it is from the tent cities that have sprung up that any sense of alternative has emerged.

Alan Tuckman

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Note

1 Varoufakis, Y., Halevi, J. & Theocarakis, N. 2010, *Modern political economics: making senses of the post-2008 world*, Routledge, London.

A New Revolution

Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolution*, Verso, 2012, 238 pages, paperback ISBN 9781844678518, £12.99

This is probably the most important book for *Spokesman* readers that I have read for a long time. Paul Mason is the economics editor of the BBC's Newsnight programme and author of *Meltdown: the End of the Age of Greed*. In this book he describes his experiences of actually participating

in the protests, disturbances and occupations in London, Athens, Cairo, New York, Oklahoma, Kenya, Spain, Palestine, Libya and Manila during the revolutionary year of 2011. His aim was to discover the nature of the people revolting and their motivation. What is so important is that these popular movements were not part of trade union or other collective organisations, but of individual protests linked up by the new technological means of communication; Facebook, Blogs and Twitter.

What is astonishing about Mason's evidence is the sheer numbers involved – not thousands or even tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands, even millions in London and Cairo. Nearly all the protesters everywhere, moreover, are young – between 15 and 30 years of age, linked together by their new mobile phone access, which enables them to know what others are doing all over the world, well ahead of the journalists' reports and the police mobilisation. On motivation, Mason shows that the destruction of life opportunities in the economic crisis, plus the obvious growing inequalities between the super-rich and the poor, lie at the heart of the protests. But it is the sudden change in life chances for so many that made 2011 a year of revolution at the time of a growing sense of individual consciousness. 'I am not myself. I am someone else who was born today' was what a young woman in Cairo's Tahrir Square told her mother.

There is no ideology driving this movement, but there are ideas of social justice and fairness circulating widely among the social media, and it is the expanded power of the individual that is being celebrated. What is new is that the urban poor, jobless youths, street traders and women are refusing to be labelled 'chavs' ('rednecks' in the US) and demanding their rights, and, as Mason adds, 'in every garret there is a laptop'. At least, the first phase of democratic revolution can be achieved, Mason insists, by getting inside the decision cycle of those in power. It changes the balance of power between the leaders and the led. It is not anarchy, as Durkheim saw it, but a mass refusal to co-operate.

For many young people the situation in 2011 was nothing less than disastrous. Unemployment in Greece had begun to rise; by 2011 youth unemployment was running at 46%. In Portugal and Ireland and soon in Spain, there was the same situation. So long as the Germans refused to underwrite an issue of Eurobonds, it was inevitable that Italy, France and others in the Eurozone would join them. The UK suffered a peculiar problem. Jobs created under Labour had been filled by European immigrants. Resentment was directed at the immigrants, but the lost jobs in the public sector under the Coalition's austerity measures were not being made up for in the private sector and unemployment, especially

among young people, created much disillusionment. Among new university graduates there was special anxiety, because they had assumed that their future was secure. Those families with mortgages living on their credit cards found that their assets were worth much less. Some joined the protesters and even the looters.

The extent of Facebook and Twitter grew exponentially. By 2011 there were 750 million users of Facebook, launched in 2004, and Twitter, launched two years later, had 250 million users in 2011 sending out a billion tweets a week. 'For me it's second nature' said one tweeter, quoted by Mason. 'I tweet in my dreams.' The new technology provides a social network for quite individualistic purposes, which challenge the old methods of organisation – parties, trade unions, leaders, hierarchies – and leave wide open what type of economy would start the transition to sustainable and equitable growth. Mason wants to remind us that Marx's aim was not class solidarity but the liberation of human beings. He quotes Marx writing in 1841,

'Human emancipation will only be complete, when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species being.'

Mason's studies in the United States reveal the disillusion with Obama and an even deeper sense 'that we were great once'. Obama's concessions to the Republicans over health and cuts in relief for the poor are bitterly resented. Mason quotes the remarkable two week occupation of Madison Capitol by students and young teachers threatened with reduced salaries and loss of their trade union negotiating rights. Others followed. Moreover, current high rates of unemployment are contrasted with the wealth of a few and the huge numbers of unregistered migrants – perhaps 20 million, mainly from Latin America. The idea of occupying space has taken on everywhere, from Tahrir Square to Syntagma Square in Athens, the US capitols, Wall Street and St.Paul's in London. It is a statement of power in a powerless situation for most ordinary people, and it has a certain resonance.

The penultimate chapter of the book looks back in history to consider earlier similar periods of protest. Mason singles out not only the Roosevelt years of response to the last major economic recession in the 1930s, but also examines the revolution of 1848, syndicalism in the 1900s, and the student revolt in 1968. The Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, published in 1848, opened with the words, 'A spectre is haunting Europe: the spectre of Communism'. It is not yet haunting Europe today, but the seeds are being sown at least in Europe, the United States, Latin America and in the Arab world.

Mason's last chapter looks at the developing world of Asia. There is surprisingly little about China and India, but a fascinating study of the Philippines, sub-titled 'Slum dwellers versus the super rich'. This reaches the strange conclusion that the skills of the workers in the slums are an essential element in a certain form of capitalism, which cannot at all easily be replaced. Only in the more advanced countries do the 99% of the population have the education, the ingenuity and the intelligence to challenge the life destroying impacts of poverty, inequality and the monopolised power of the 1% élite. Mason ends his book with the lines he heard being chanted in Cairo's Tahrir Square:

'When the people decide to live,
Destiny will obey,
Darkness will disappear
And chains will be broken.'

Michael Barratt Brown

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In *Spokesman 115*, Michael Barratt Brown reviewed Susan Williams's book *Who Killed Hammarskjold? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa* (Hurst & Co, 2011). He has subsequently drawn our attention to the *London Review of Books* of 26 January 2011 which carries two letters, one from Ms Williams and the other from Rolf Rembe in Stockholm, that, he says, tend to confirm 'the doubts of many in a position to know concerning the verdict of pilot error reached by the colonial authorities and suggest a deliberate operation to stop Hammarskjold's UN mission organised by those authorities'.

The Blood Never Dried

Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*, Verso, 2011, 480 pages, hardback ISBN 9781844677382, £20.00

The author admits that this book has been many years in gestation and it is, perhaps, therefore serendipitous that its publication should roughly coincide with various 'worthies' pontificating on the supposed positive outcomes of empire. The latest contribution to this nostalgic genre is BBC television's *Empire*, written and presented by Jeremy Paxman, who darts about the globe meeting people who reveal, as he expects, that the Empire

was not such a bad thing after all, marvelling at this plucky island race which managed to subdue a quarter of the world's population. Previously, Gordon Brown has suggested that 'British values', as represented by the British Empire, have 'influenced the rest of the world' and 'we should celebrate much of our past rather than apologise for it'. Niall Ferguson, in his book *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, quotes approvingly the comment of one Seymour Martin Lipset to the effect that 'British colonies had a significantly better chance of achieving democratisation after independence than those ruled by other countries'. The assertion may be dubious to say the least, but if we broadened the scope to take in other forms of social turmoil that the British Empire has left in its wake then the picture gets decidedly bleaker. The problems of India's partition and Kashmir, Ireland, Cyprus, Palestine, South Africa and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) can, in part, be ascribed to the manipulation of existing social divisions. A conscious policy of 'divide and rule', with one group often selected, in preference to other ethnic or religious groups, for imperial policing and the lower echelons of the state bureaucracy, left behind fractured societies, riven to this day.

The book does occasionally touch on such questions, but it is above all a purely factual work cataloguing the response of the colonised to the colonisers, during the period 1755 to 1858. Its central theme shows that, far from welcoming their new masters, the indigenous populations were unambiguously and uniformly hostile – and with good reason. In North America the French and British colonisers, together with the slave-holding newly founded settler republic, the United States of America, vigorously pursued genocidal policies towards the Native Americans. As Gott explains, even the use of primitive germ warfare was employed with attempts to infect Native Americans with smallpox and other infectious maladies of the Europeans. This was apart from the usual forms of rapine inflicted on the East Coast tribes which succeeded in decimating their numbers in a relatively short time. One cruelty that the author highlights is the British army's recruitment of black slaves during its struggle with the infant North American settler republic. These former slaves were to be granted freedom on the conclusion of the war, but for obvious reasons, as the war was lost, they had to be found a home where they would not be subjected to punishment and renewed slavery. A large body of ex-slave soldiers ended up in Newfoundland, later to be shipped to West Africa to form the British Colony of Sierra Leone, as it was felt that these black ex-soldiers would be able to withstand the vicissitudes of the climate and the hostility of the existing residents. In fact the British were keen to try the

experimental colonial manoeuvres in Sierra Leone because of the necessity of finding a home for domestic convicts and other malcontents after American independence had made their dispatch there impossible. Finding a new 'gulag' and hastening the cessation of using prison hulks, a perceived temporary measure, was certainly for government a powerful stimulus to voyages of 'discovery' such as that of Captain Cook's reconnoitring of the Pacific.

The book covers many of the machinations of the British conquest of Australasia and the tensions between settlers and the authorities. The author highlights the harsh treatment of the Aborigines and Maoris, which in the case of the indigenous inhabitants of Tasmania resulted in complete extinction. There is an interesting quote from Captain Cook on the life of the Aborigines which his fellow countrymen were about to destroy:

'They live in a tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the inequality of condition: the earth and the sea of their own accord furnishes them with all the things necessary for life; they covet not magnificent houses, household stuff etc.,'

The British Empire did them no favours – contrast the above with the blighted communities of the present day. Gott gives a detailed account of the development of colonisation and the various armed conflicts with the Aborigines, which were both brutal and very one sided. There is also a chapter on Maori resistance in New Zealand but, unlike many of the countries that made up the Empire, there was little or no serious competition from other European foreign powers for hegemonic control of Australasia. This is not the case with most of the other chapters, which are woven around the conflicts of the European powers who were frequently at war up until the Congress of Vienna in 1815. These wars in particular form the back-cloth to the many slave rebellions in the Caribbean and also the British conquest of India. In particular, the Napoleonic period and the rising of the Haitian Black Jacobins and the impact of the French Revolution are integral to the twists and turns of British expansion in the Caribbean. The appeal for slavery to end in the Americas was also capitalised on by the British in its shifting alliances with slave and Maroon rebellions.

The French in particular, but the Portuguese and Dutch as well, were in direct competition with the British for control of India. This was finally resolved in 1757 by the battle of Plassey, and from this point the book takes us through successive military campaigns to crush Indian resistance. The British relied on native recruits known as Sepoys for the majority of its troops and it was necessary to keep a firm grip on their discipline and loyalty to the Raj, infractions of which were punished with much brutality. Even before the

Great Mutiny of 1857, revolts in the ranks were by no means rarities amongst both Hindu and Moslem recruits. The most feared punishment practised by the British was ‘cannonading’ where the unfortunate victim was tied to the muzzle of a field gun and blasted to smithereens. This form of punishment was used extensively during the mutiny of 1857, which is charted in detail in the book including some photographs.

This is an extensive and comprehensive work covering resistance in many other locations including Ireland, West Africa, South Africa, Afghanistan, Burma and Sarawak. It does not touch upon the economics of the Empire in any detail or the ideological ramifications of denying freedom to so many people and nations, but it exhaustively shows the events of resistance over a particular period in history. It is to be hoped that the author intends to bring the book up to date with a successor work taking us up to the eclipse of formal empire at least. Because this volume ends in 1858, the great omission is, of course, the so-called ‘scramble for Africa’ in which Britain added even greater swathes of territory and encountered further indigenous resistance. The book is, however, a mine of information and a counterblast to those who would seek to gloss over the horrors of the British Empire.

Paxman in his televised oration contrasted two aphorisms, describing the Empire as an entity on which the sun never set or the blood never dried – this book confirms the latter.

John Daniels

America’s Wars

Vijay Mehta, *The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World*, Pluto Press, 2012, 250 pages, ISBN 9780745332246, £14.99

Vijay Mehta is the chair of Uniting for Peace and founding trustee of the Fortune Forum charity. This interesting book of his has a bad title. ‘Killing’ implies single murders, as in the Danish book and TV series, ‘The Killing’. It is perhaps understandably used here, because Vijay Mehta wants to emphasise the preparedness of the US secret services to use killing to dispose of enemies, as in the case of Lumumba, Hammarskjöld, Guevara, Allende or Letelier. The sub-title of the book is better; the book is about ‘fuelling war’, mostly by the USA.

Propaganda presents the United States as the great champion of peace,

democracy, free trade, food aid and open government, but the true situation revealed in this book is very different. The sums spent by the USA on preparing for wars and conducting them are astronomical, exceeding all the combined military expenditure of other nations and three times what would be needed to provide food and water for the poor people in the world, and end their poverty. And the figure of \$550 billion spent by the US in 2008, as Mehta explains, did not include 'military assistance', balanced by the value of US equipment sold to clients such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, nor the sums provided in other US budgets such as the Forces' pensions and compensation for injury.

US Governments, Mehta argues, have used their military power to coerce other governments, and particularly those with oil reserves and other key raw materials, to make these available specifically for US use. This is most evident, as Mehta shows, in US support for dictatorial and corruptible regimes in the Arabian peninsular, in Latin America, and in West Africa. It has also been evident in the actual wars fought by the USA in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, parts of Latin America, and in the threat of war in Iran. What Mehta shows most convincingly is the disdain shown by US Governments to the peace-making role of the United Nations.

Authority of the Security Council is supposedly required for any national military action. But the US has embarked on the deployment of armed force without UN support in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan. John Bolton, President Bush's Ambassador to the UN, described the top floors of the UN building in New York as 'dispensable', and even President Obama's former Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, is quoted as berating the European members of NATO for failing to spend more than 2 per cent of their national wealth on weapons and people to use them. The survival of a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) after the demise of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact is shown by Mehta to be due to the US Government's need to maintain a large military force.

Mehta discusses at length the rationale for United States' militarisation. It is supposed that military technology is the key to all technological development. But this is only because the most powerful corporations in the US, such as General Electric, Boeing, Raytheon, and Halliburton are heavily involved in military production and supply. It is in this context that Mehta concerns himself so much with the growing threat of China to US dominance in every spectrum, land, sea, air and space. China is shown to be carrying out every type of espionage to obtain the secrets of US high technology; what Robert Gates is quoted as calling 'America's crown jewels'. The US buys consumer goods from China but pays with dollars,

not with advanced US producer goods. How long the US debt to China can be allowed to grow is a big question, which Mehta does not seek to answer.

The concluding chapter of this book, an Epilogue on ‘The Path Ahead’, is the least satisfactory in my opinion. One observation which I would dispute is that a major task is to demolish economic theory. Not all economic theory is wrong or harmful. I would exempt Keynesian economics from Mehta’s denunciation. The proposal to disband NATO I entirely agree with, but where should we start? The web used by the social movement, micro finance and Fair Trade are all movements recommended for support, and I would agree. The Appendix contains an extraordinarily valuable list of Global Peace Organisations, with their addresses. But the big question remains – how to develop a movement in the United States which would challenge the present power of the great corporations to determine US foreign policy and to influence US election results.

Michael Barratt Brown

Socialist Register

Leo Panitch, Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber (editors), *The Crisis and the Left: Socialist Register 2012*, Merlin Press, 320 pages, hardback ISBN 9780850366815, £50.00, paperback ISBN 9780850366822, £15.95

The latest edition of the *Socialist Register* continues the theme of the 2011 edition and is again devoted to the continuing global crisis of capitalism. Historically the *Register* has always had, and rightly so, an international sweep but has often found room for the inclusion of a number of articles on British themes. It is with some nostalgic recognition that, perhaps, over the years, these have diminished. Could this be realistically justified on the grounds of the particularly uninspiring terrain the British Left has been forced to inhabit for the last few years? All three of the present editors are based in North America, where the sub-prime match lit the global debt conflagration, and certainly it is there that the Occupy Wall Street movement has demonstrated the power of innovative protest. The editors confront what they stress in the preface is the continuing audacity of the neo-liberal schema: the pursuit of policies, in the face of crisis, which are so draconic that they may yet inspire generalised unrest. They could even turn around the largely pedestrian and down-right cowardly response of social-democracy in most of Europe – witness the heartening mass

participation in the 30th November one-day strike in Britain.

Certainly the British situation deserves special analysis for the reason that, ever since 1979, it has been a test bed for the implementation of the neo-liberal agenda, under both the Conservative and New Labour governments. The Thatcherism of the 1970s and 80s sold off the utility companies and, with its cunningly divisive sale of council housing, induced a bubble in owner occupation, paving the way for rampant housing inflation and the consequent housing shortage. In fact the first article in the book is one by the Anglo-American political geographer and proselytizer for Marxian economics, David Harvey, who in an interesting and informative article traces aspects of the roots of the present crisis partly in the urban post-war expansion of the suburbs and urban development in general.

Harvey takes issue with some Marxist economists who, he considers, underplay the causal role of housing and the property market in capitalist crisis, preferring to concentrate on under-consumption and the falling organic rate of profit as the primary culprits. Land price bubbles have been a common feature of American economic history, and of many other nations. In the US, prior to the present crisis, we had the Savings and Loans débâcle under Reagan, the Japanese property bubble and, to round it off nicely, the sub-prime mortgage banking crash. In our own neck of the woods we have had the neo-liberal approach to housing foisted on us, with the 'freeing up' of rent control and the selling off of council housing, all of which helped to sustain a housing bubble until the banks realised that their number was up and had to go cap-in-hand to the governmental begging bowl. Harvey makes a very thoughtful case for adding urbanisation to our understanding of both boom and bust and shows how the continuing sub-prime crisis has led to a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich.

This urban crisis suggests another area where the struggle for social redistribution of wealth and control over our own lives should take place, namely the built environment, through tenant groups and the like. We have seen this in action in the US with Occupy Wall Street groups going to the aid of sub-prime homeowners about to be evicted. Harvey also discusses the credit system and how it has the dual function of being a conduit for production, but is inevitably used for facilitating speculation and the accumulation of capital. In the US and elsewhere naked class warfare is being fought on one side by an alliance of finance capital, developers and construction companies against whose predatory practices the isolated home owner is no match. The article has a section on the Chinese housing and property boom, and here again Harvey notes the danger signals,

comparing it with Florida of the 1920s, which JK Galbraith has noted in his book *The Great Crash 1929*, ‘contained all of the elements of the classic bubble’.

Whilst much of Harvey’s piece draws upon the experience of the United States, the article by Ursula Huws has an added resonance for British readers, dealing as it does with the privatisation of the state itself, an ongoing process we are presently enduring. If privatisation is allowed to wrap its tentacles further around health provision, care of the disabled and the elderly, combined with the constant political clamour to cut our cloth to match our purse, it is only to be expected that eventually there will be moves towards a fully tiered system of provision with ‘top-up payments’ and only a basic service free. Both the Conservative and New Labour governments have proved innovators, within the neo-liberal paradigm, starting with direct privatisation of the utilities, moving on to the private finance initiative, compulsory competitive tendering, academies and ‘free schools’, and now for the finale – the privatisation of state institutions and, in particular, the NHS, itself a living example of a highly effective un-marketised non-capitalist enterprise. As the author puts it, within this shrinking state its purpose will be no longer to deliver services but merely to procure them, and she quotes the example of Suffolk County Council which is trying to put theory into practice by plans to reduce their present 27,000 staff to 300. There is, of course, the necessary ideological smokescreen, the rhetoric of the ‘big society’ and the ‘empowerment’ of local communities through truncated undemocratic membership dispensations; for example, foundation hospitals, and allowing charities to take over previous welfare functions of the state. The author observes that there is disagreement within the élite between those who are happy to have a large state, as long as it is profit-based, and the minimalists. This is an interesting article and the thinking behind it could be compared with Naomi Klein’s idea of ‘disaster capitalism’. The author concludes with an appeal for ‘new forms of organisation’ to combat the ‘globally-organised employers’. We could, perhaps, add to this the need for the existing organisations, namely the trade unions, to intensify their attempts to think globally and act locally.

An article by Nicole Aschoff on the collapse and resurrection of the United States’ motor industry, and its connection with the credit crunch and the continuing debt crisis, exemplifies the aggressive, amoral nature of modern higher management practice with its ideology of ‘creative destruction’. The ability of employers and government to seize the crisis as an opportunity to fulfil their ambitions (which in this case was a dramatic diminution of the power of the United Automobile Workers) and

make a drastic reduction in wages and conditions is covered chronologically in detail. The management succeeded in virtually all of its aims and the UAW policy of concessions did nothing to halt the mass redundancies, wage reductions and erosion of benefits. Additionally, the fall in trade union membership was not staunch and non-unionised foreign assembly plants and suppliers have, so far, remained immune to the blandishments of the UAW. Besides struggling to increase unionisation, the author recommends that the autoworkers look to placing themselves in the forefront of 'green technology development' to revitalise their struggle and presumably form an alliance with the powerful environmental movement in North America. The car industry in the US, and it may be a valid perspective for the European and Asian industries, is not to be viewed as one in decline but one of constant reorganisation and adjustment to the market, truly a process of 'creative destruction', but why must the autoworkers always be the victims of the necessary changes?

In this *Register* there are many more enlightening articles on aspects of the current crisis including the new American Poor Law, the contradictions of neo-liberal climate policy, China's position in the current mess, why Latin America has weathered the financial storm better, how Ireland and Eastern Europe have been affected and, perhaps oddly, an article on racial disparity in analytical texts which requires 67 footnotes and familiarity with a lot of US publications which, unfortunately, this reviewer does not possess.

There is a fascinating article on finance, oil and the Arab awakening, explaining the centrality of the Gulf States to American military power and wealth. The peculiar make-up of the population within the Gulf States, with its very high input of migrant labour, has not rendered it immune to the uprising in the Arab world. Although the coverage of such turmoil is hardly mentioned in the Western media, with the exception of Bahrain, savage pre-emptive repression of discontent has been the norm, particularly in Saudi Arabia and Oman. The article concentrates on the symbiotic relationship between the ruling élites of the US and the Gulf States, and the importance of the latter in recycling petrol dollars and world liquidity. For example, the increase in oil prices over the period 2002-6 has earned the Gulf States some *extra* £510 billion out of a worldwide total of £1.02 trillion.

The final three articles are taken up with the Eurozone crisis and what might be the alternatives for the Left in this context. Of course, the reader will be aware that the articles were written in 2011 and this is still, at the time of writing, very much an ongoing crisis. The most substantial of the pieces is by Elmar Altavater, author of *The Limits of Globalisation*, who

teaches at the Free University, Berlin. He sees the crisis as one of capital accumulation expressed in the huge imbalances in current accounts between 11 nations in deficit and six in surplus. The crisis follows a pattern: having started in the property sector, it moves to the banks, the banks pass it on to the government as sovereign debt and, finally, the working class is expected to pick up the burden. However, as banks protect their reserves and unemployment and inflation increase, the tax revenue falls and welfare payments increase, thus expanding sovereign debt. For the author 'there are only two paths in Europe right now': the collapse of the Eurozone or, alternatively, moves towards 'European statehood', and both present serious difficulties. He notes in this context the 'monsters' of the drama, the rating agencies, more powerful in influencing events than some governments.

The second article, by Costas Lapavista, sees the Eurozone as a weak link in the chains of capitalism, and capable of being broken if the Left adopts 'radical solutions', ditching the 'Europeanism' of more optimistic Left pundits. Out should go any pretence of converting the Euro into a 'good Euro', and the idea of monetary union should be abandoned as it is not possible to reform in the interest of the working class. Lapavista summarily dismisses issuing Eurobonds through the European Central Bank, commenting that the latter institution 'does not possess a magic wand to make debts disappear'. With this rejection he would appear to be in accord with some Eurozone leaders, Angela Merkel in particular. Possibly, he is not aware of comprehensive proposals made by Stuart Holland to revitalise the EU economy by using the European Investment Bank, which already issues bonds in its own right, as the vehicle for issuing Eurobonds (see *Spokesman 113 and 115*).

The final article, by Michel Husson, suggests that socialists cohere around what he calls 'a strategy of extension'. If a radical government of the Left materialises it would institute changes that might bring it into conflict with other EU states. Such a government would not seek to break up the Eurozone but should be prepared to work outside its rules and, if necessary, be prepared to abandon the common currency. Of course, this is all predicated on the basis that austerity measures illicit a response that transforms the present political map, both nationally and internationally.

As usual, the high standard we have grown to expect from the *Socialist Register* is maintained in what promises to be an interesting year in terms of possible changes. There could be radical change, but it is equally possible that we see an intensification of the trends towards barbarism, with war clouds again gathering in the Middle East. The Western power

élite may be faced with an economic crisis, but it shows no signs of changing course from the brutal economics of austerity and the hardly suppressed desire to intervene militarily whenever its interests are questioned. This edition of the *Register* helps us to understand events as they unfold and, hopefully, will help to guide our future actions.

John Daniels

Healthy Prognosis

Steve Brouwer, *Revolutionary Doctors – How Venezuela and Cuba are changing the world's conception of health care*, Monthly Review Press, 240 pages, paperback ISBN 9781583672396, £15

Experience has taught me to be wary of well-meaning liberals from Europe and the USA. They are full of good intentions, but tend to see the reality through rose-tinted spectacles. (To give just one example: most of what you read about 'liberation theology' and 'the preferential option for the poor' is total nonsense.) I approached this book with similar misgivings. For a start, I hate the title. We should get away from the idea of doctors and that they know best! They are not that important, only of marginal use.

So, the book gets off to a bad start and the early chapters don't improve things much: lots of statistics, only of some interest to those with a special interest in the subject, but otherwise pretty boring. I actually have a specialist interest myself, and was still pretty bored. Then things started to look up. Once Mr Brouwer stops talking about health he becomes very interesting. His brief survey and analysis of what has been going on over the last few years in Latin America (and still continues with ever-growing momentum) are superb. So while I might advise you to skip some of the earlier chapters, I highly recommend this book to anyone who has the slightest interest in Latin American and North American politics and, in the end, health, too.

Even as the war criminals in the corridors of power in Washington and European capitals run amok in the Middle East, this book offers some hope. There are cracks appearing in the foundations of the empire of the Great Satan in the North. It used to be poor little Cuba and Nicaragua that got beaten up, but they somehow resisted and survived. Now they are not alone. Other, bigger countries are joining in the act. The visions of Francisco Morazan and Simon Boliver are beginning to have some kind of

reality: the United States of Latin America. There is increasing co-operation between Latin American countries, even to throwing off the yoke of the dollar and having their own monetary system, the Sucre. Of course, the conservative forces of rich oligarchies and fascist military are still around, backed by the United States, the authors of unbelievable repression, ‘disappearances’ and ‘dirty wars’ in the past. Their recent coups in Venezuela and Ecuador came to nothing, so they seem to be on the run. Only in Honduras did they succeed, in 2009, but immediately ran into deep trouble, ostracised by most of their neighbours, so much so that they had to subject themselves to a kind of truce with the President they had deposed, brokered by the President of Colombia and their arch-enemy, the loathed Hugo Chavez of Venezuela (full title: La Republica Bolivariana De Venezuela, which is why this book refers to the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’. It has nothing to do with Bolivia; it’s Venezuelan.)

Mr Brouwer concentrates on the regimes of the Castro brothers in Cuba and Hugo Chavez, but Evo Morales of Bolivia, Rafael Corea of Ecuador, and Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua also get honourable mention, as does the ousted President of Honduras, ‘Mel’ Zelaya, now back in his country after months in exile trying to build a new Party of Resistance – he has a long way to go. The author could also have mentioned Cristina Hernandez of Argentina, the widow of Nestor Kirchner, and just re-elected, Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, who succeeded Lula Silva, Fernando Lugo, the President of Paraguay, and perhaps even ‘Pepe’ Mujica of Uruguay. I know little of his politics, but I love him because his image is so different from the average politician’s: he looks as if he has just crawled out from under a hedge after spending the night in a field.

The new President of Peru, Ollanta Humala, is still an unknown quantity, as is the President of Haiti, Michel Martelly. I like him, too. Whilst on the campaign trail he danced in front of his audiences, and wiggled his bum to their great delight. (Can you imagine Barak Obama or David Cameron doing that?) Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia is interesting, too. Is he slowly throwing off the Gringo yoke? He maintains close contact with his more radical neighbours. The only lost causes seem to be Mexico, although Andrés Obrador, who was probably defrauded of the Presidency in 2006, is making a come-back, and Chile. Both countries have seen huge, mostly peaceful, demonstrations going on for months on end. They don’t seem, so far, to have made much difference.

But back to health, which this book is supposed to be about, for all its superb survey of local, that is to say, Latin American politics. What relevance does it have for UK readers? Quite a lot, I should say. I have no

personal knowledge or experience of the Venezuelan health services, though I do of the Cuban, Nicaraguan, Honduran and British ones. The Cuban and Nicaraguan health services provide useful models.

The truth is, sophisticated medicine does not make much difference to mortality or life expectancy. We can only hope in the case of Hugo Chavez, confronting cancer, that it does. He faces his illness with extraordinary courage. He talks about it openly, makes no attempt to hide the ravages of post-operative therapies that have left him looking like Humpty Dumpty, bald as an egg. He remains his old defiant, challenging, articulate self, and may he long continue to be so. But such medicine, admirable as it may be (and very expensive) makes little difference to national health. What makes the difference is hygiene, nutrition and basic back-up services. Both Cuba and Nicaragua are big on general health advice, for example, keep those with diarrhoea well hydrated with drinks you can make up in the house, and with alternative medicines.

Nicaragua is very involved with herbal medicine, as is Cuba, which also pushes homeopathy and floral essences, financing research into both. Mr Brouwer mentions medicinal plants. He could have said more. Having no knowledge of health practices in Venezuela, I don't know. Perhaps there was not much more to say. Yet, if the links between Venezuela and Cuba are as close as he claims, there must be a huge input about alternative medicines. They are cheap, reasonably safe and effective. You don't have to be a rocket scientist or brain surgeon to put them into practice. These, along with proper food, clean water, hygiene and sanitation, plus a little happiness (difficult to measure, but undoubtedly it plays its part) are the ingredients for a longer and healthier life.

Read the book. Skip a few chapters as you will, but it's worth reading. Interested in Latin America? In health? There is something for all of us.

Nigel Potter, Honduras

Activist

Mark Seddon, *Standing for Something: Life in the Awkward Squad*, Biteback Publishing, 258 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849541237, £16.99

Mark Seddon has produced a highly entertaining and instructive account of his many years of life as a political activist, campaigner and journalist. It makes a much more stimulating read than the memoirs of many a New Labour insider. He is proud to declare himself an 'outsider', but did get

close enough to provide valuable testimony on how the whole operation worked. In fact, he was once – but only once – invited to join Tony Blair for a chat on his notorious sofa where all key government policies are alleged to have been formed!

Mark became interested in politics as a schoolboy and, to the dismay of his family, joined the Labour Party at the tender age of 15. He soon became an active member of the local party in Devizes, which was close to the minor public school he attended. When he went up to the University of East Anglia he became heavily involved in both student politics and campaigning with the Norwich Labour Party, which was then one of the strongest and most active in the country. He mobilised students to help in local election campaigns and became the Labour Club's candidate for President of the Students' Union at around the time of the great miners' strike of 1984. Seddon led the students in active support of the Durham miners who came to picket East Anglian ports, and visited the Durham and Notts coalfields in solidarity.

In 1993, Seddon's political campaigning and successful journalism won him the editor's job at *Tribune*, the labour leftwing weekly. Nobody knew then that this was on the eve of events that would radically transform the Labour Party and the political process in Britain. John Smith, who had become the popular and consensual leader of the Party, died suddenly and tragically the following spring. He was succeeded by Tony Blair through a deal with Gordon Brown with which we are now all too familiar. Blair quickly set out on the path of 'New Labour' by demolishing Clause 4 and, as only later became fully apparent, carrying forward the Thatcher neo-liberal project for the economy and society at the expense of labour's traditional social democratic aspirations.

Seddon and his *Tribune* colleagues* were right to be uneasy about what was to come when, on the day after the 1997 Election, they huddled together in their favourite haunt, the Gay Hussar in Soho, while organised flag-waving triumphalism reigned in Downing Street. Pushing through the New Labour project required an ever-tightening stranglehold on the party's policies and institutions by Blair, Brown and – Seddon's principal *bête noire* – Peter Mandelson ('self-serving, egotistical and narcissistic'). But this process all took some time and, while there was still life and spirit in the Party, Seddon managed to get himself elected to the new National Executive Committee on the slate of the Grassroots Alliance with the highest vote.

However, he and his grassroots colleagues were but a small minority on the Executive, and were unable to prevent the purge of the 'awkward

squad' members of the European Parliamentary Labour Party like Ken Coates. This was achieved through the introduction of a new closed list system for the 1999 Euro elections in large regional constituencies where only those near the top of the party list had any chance of success. This control by the centre was subsequently extended to national elections by other means. Seddon himself became a victim of this process and, despite local support in winnable constituencies, was only ever permitted to stand in the hopeless Tory seat of Buckingham.

Although Seddon had supported the action against Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, and NATO's later intervention in Kosovo, he was sceptical about further intervention in Iraq and, early on, publicly expressed his doubts about Blair's claims of its possession of weapons of mass destruction. He visited Iraq himself on two occasions and, with the help of George Galloway, managed to secure an exclusive interview with Iraq's veteran foreign minister, Tariq Aziz. Aziz gave assurances about the weapons and asked Seddon to deliver an invitation to the prime minister to come and see for himself. But Blair, along with Alastair Campbell, simply treated Seddon's initiative with derision. Neither was Gordon Brown any more receptive, being preoccupied with Seddon's strong objections to his pet private finance initiative project.

Seddon opposed military action against Iraq without specific United Nations sanction at the Labour Party conference and, subsequently, on the National Executive. But with the whole weight of the government machine, reinforced by 'dodgy dossiers', he and a handful of colleagues (Ann Black, Christine Shawcroft, Dennis Skinner) were unable to prevail. On the eve of the invasion their resolution was ruled out on procedural grounds and Seddon walked out of the meeting.

Soon after, tens of thousands walked out of the Labour Party. The trauma and the tragedy of the war finally knocked the heart out of the Labour Party. Mark Seddon did not quit but I suspect that it was a similar disenchantment that impelled him to seek new pastures. In 2005, he left the National Executive to pioneer a new role for Al Jazeera, the Arabic television station, as their United Nations correspondent in New York. His adventures and encounters in that role provide many fascinating stories and pen pictures of people he encountered in the course of his work, both great and small. His assessments of some of the statesmen and celebrities he met up with or managed to interview are sometimes surprising but always interesting, just as they are when he discusses his experience of some of the heavyweights and not-such-heavyweights of the British Labour movement.

Where does the 16-year rule of Blair and Brown leave the Labour Party? Mark Seddon says that Labour ‘gives every impression of not knowing what on earth it stands for’ and that it is now extremely difficult for Labour to reconnect with its natural supporters. And yet his ‘hunch’ is that ‘Labour will eventually be radicalised’ in opposition. The signs are not too hopeful just now with Ed Miliband surrounded by unreconstructed Blairites and seemingly too timid to develop an independent base. But for the sake of the political health of the nation, to say nothing of social justice, equality and wellbeing, we must hope that Mark’s natural optimism will prevail.

Ken Fleet

*One of the *Tribune* diners that day was Martin Rowson who has contributed a foreword and cartoons to this book.

The Commissioner’s View

Thomas Hammarberg, *Human Rights in Europe: No grounds for complacency*, Council of Europe Publishing 2011, 370 pages, paperback ISBN 9789287169167, 19 euros

As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg offers an insider’s view of what he has witnessed after visiting almost all of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. After meeting with various politicians, judges, prosecutors and victims of human rights violations, Hammarberg expresses impatience for the lack of passion and resolve to turn human rights principles into reality.

It is only fairly recently that human rights have been formally recognised as fundamental to securing freedom, justice and peace in the world, and it has taken around 70 years to get where we are today. International treaties have been drafted, ratified and implemented, and have sought to protect civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and the rights of individuals during time of armed conflict. One of the most important international treaties of the previous century, concerning the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for individuals in Europe, came into force on 3 September 1953. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) drew inspiration from its predecessor, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and sought to attain effective political democracy through the incorporation of what became a traditional civil liberties approach. The additional protocols to

the ECHR have also had the effect of expanding the rights that can be protected; but as the closest thing Europe has to a ‘Bill of Rights’, the ECHR is vitally important to every individual within the jurisdiction of the High Contracting Parties, and must be adhered to. With every member state of the Council of Europe having ratified the ECHR, there is no room, and certainly no grounds, for complacency. Thomas Hammarberg provides an account of the shortcomings that exist in European human rights implementation today, offering recommendations and concrete remedies to tackle this fundamental issue.

Over the years, the ECHR has proven that individuals can indeed challenge High Contracting Parties who are in breach of any of the rights and freedoms afforded under the Convention, with access to effective remedies. This has included breaches of habeas corpus rights, the right to a fair trial and the prohibition of torture (of particular relevance in recent years, where signatories have taken measures derogating from obligations in times of emergency). Even with agreed standards of human rights at European and international level, there is an implementation gap and standards are not consistently enforced.

Of all the circumstances that could delay necessary reforms or even hinder a culture of respect for human rights or the rule of law, the ‘war on terror’ is at the top of the list. Hammarberg names and shames the European governments that did not defend their citizens from grave human rights violations, allowed unlawful indefinite detention in Guantanamo bay, and were compliant with the CIA’s secret abduction tactics – all in the name of national security and counter terrorism. It is rightly argued that terrorism should not be fought with methods that violate human rights, and that this lesson has already been learned through the experiences of Northern Ireland (directing the reader to further useful documentation that highlights the work of cross-community human rights groups).

Hammarberg attributes this hypocrisy and lack of adherence to agreed international human rights standards to a lack of political will – hijacking, distorting and demeaning the importance of these rights in order to use them as propaganda tools against other states for the preservation of national pride. This is particularly relevant to counter-terrorism measures, as well as the existence of xenophobia and lack of identity rights. Even with Europe’s multicultural, inherently plural nature, discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, ethnicity, faith, nationality, social class, age, political viewpoint, and many others still exists. Hammarberg argues that states should actively promote fundamental principles of pluralism, tolerance and broad-mindedness on which democracy itself is based, and promotes

a platform for representatives of non-dominant groups to create continuous dialogue between groups in order to avoid a widening of the gaps for growing inequalities and injustice. A sound recommendation, followed by more practical measures needed to address discrimination; further issues, such as the European Court of Human Rights' Margin of Appreciation (*marge d'appréciation*), which takes into account cultural, historic and philosophical differences between states in question, could be more fully addressed in order to assess the potential for this concept to be added to the list of excuses for delaying necessary reforms.

Of more recent issues, Hammarberg also discusses human rights in relation to the global economic crisis; socio-economic rights have traditionally not been fully recognised as justiciable in some areas of Europe, and were not incorporated into the ECHR, only later codified in the separate European Social Charter. Again, this is another area of human rights law that has been politicised, with some regarding socio-economic rights as political aspirations to be addressed at the discretion of the individual governments (for example, rights to adequate standards of living, food, education and rights to housing, health and work). The monitoring body of the Social Charter (the European Committee of Social Rights) provides an effective procedure and useful mechanism to support member states in efforts to achieve their duties under the Social Charter. However, as Hammarberg highlights, not even a third of the Council of Europe states have decided to become party to it – furthermore undermining the great advances that have been made.

This book offers a concise overview of the current position of human rights law in Europe today and looks into further issues, such as immigration and asylum policies; the rights of people with disabilities; gender rights; rights of the child, and freedom of expression – each is considered in light of examples with recommendations of further reading for more in-depth understanding. Ultimately, Hammarberg calls for stricter implementation, including systematic measures, rights-oriented budget analysis, more education on human rights, and more stringent measures to ensure that governments and international actors are held accountable for violations of human rights. Any prospect of international peace and security is inextricably linked with a respect for the human rights of others; even with the extensive human rights legislation in existence, state parties can – and certainly do – hold reservations to exclude or modify certain provisions, and it is largely due to arguments surrounding cultural relativism (see, for example, the list of reservations for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women). As this

book highlights, by challenging the current culture of hypocrisy and selective criticism on behalf of governments, human rights can gradually become distinct from politicised rhetoric that can distort and manipulate the meanings behind them. Only then might we be afforded any grounds for complacency.

Stephanie Sampson

A full pdf of this title is available from:

http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/Viewpoints/ISBN2011_en.pdf

BEN BELLA

*As we go to press, the death of Ahmed Ben Bella, founding President of Algeria, has been announced. We shall publish a full appreciation later. Meanwhile, we reprint the conclusion to **Stuart Holland's** account of his and Ken Coates' role in helping to secure the President's release from house arrest in Algeria in 1980. The full story appears in Spokesman 110 under the title 'Act and Survive'.*

'... Ben Bella made plain that, without Ken's initiative he still could have been at M'Sila, or elsewhere, under house arrest, indefinitely. He paid tribute to Amnesty International, who had published multiple protests against his imprisonment and also then his house arrest, but added: "They did well. They protested. But you acted."

There then followed an event which was Ben Bella's first public appearance in the UK since his release, at the next Labour Party Conference. Understandably, it was packed, not least by many of the Members of Parliament who had signed the early day motion [inviting Ben Bella to London]. Ben Bella spoke in French and I translated. But what he said was prescient rather than only retrospective. Especially when a question was posed: "In prison you learned Arabic and read the Qur'an. Are you now an Islamist?" To which he responded, "I am a Muslim first, an Arab second, and then an Algerian. I am also proud to be an African." There then was a follow-up question from the floor: "And what of the Qur'an?" To which he responded: "My friend, the Qur'an is the inspiration of our faith. It is not a Michelin Guide to the 20th Century." From which now, in a new millennium, many might learn.'

We are all Greeks

The apathy of the rulers of the civilized world to the astonishing circumstance of the descendants of that nation to which they owe their civilization rising as it were from the ashes of their ruin, is something perfectly inexplicable to a mere spectator of the shews of this mortal scene. We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece. But for Greece Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters ... The human form and the human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions, whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race.

Percy Bysshe Shelley
Preface to Hellas
composed 1821