

# Reviews

## The Art of Peace

**John Gittings, *The Glorious Art of Peace: From the Iliad to Iraq*, Oxford University Press 2012, 316 pages illustrated, hardback ISBN 9780199575763, £18.99**

This is an impressive book of scholarship and personal conviction. It comes with a substantial list of notes and a useful general index. All who are working for world peace will find it a great source of information and encouragement. The final sentence, a quotation from Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, about our ‘unique epoch’ sums it all up:

‘We are privileged to have the opportunity of contributing to the achievement of the goal of the abolition of war and its replacement by world law.’

Gittings takes us from ancient Greek history right up to Afghanistan and Iraq. Ignorance prevents me from commenting on Chinese and Greek peace and war history, about which Gittings clearly knows a great deal. Such history evidently was not always bloody and violent. There is a picture of quaint Chinese stone carvings of domestic calm to prove it.

More at home with Shakespeare’s dramas, I regret that in so much school literature we concentrated on single set books rather than on the range of an author’s work. Gittings seems to know all Shakespeare’s plays by heart. There is, as he makes clear, so much more to Shakespeare than Laurence Olivier in *Henry V* telling his countrymen that they would regret missing out on the chance to bump off Frenchmen.

Other names which have a place in the tradition of peacemaking will be familiar to many readers: Augustine, Erasmus, More, Kant, de Sellon, Czar Nicholas II, Bertha von Suttner and Jane Adams. At home in Britain we have Cobden, Henry Richard, Lord Cecil of League of Nations Union fame, Vera Brittain and Joseph Rotblat. These are only a few of those who have worked over the centuries, in various parts of the world, towards a time when differences will be settled by law and arbitration and not by war and violence.

There has been much progress, as Gittings makes clear, but some sad near misses as well. I did not know how close we came, with the Hoover Plan, to having a successful League of Nations Disarmament Conference, in 1932, or how largely Britain was responsible for its failure. No wonder Sylvia Pankhurst put up her ironic ‘Bomb’ statue outside her house in Epping.

Some of the numbers and achievements in terms of grassroots organising

are, by today's standards, astonishing. The League of Nations Union had, in its heyday, some 400,000 members, and was able to organise, in 1934, with the help of other organisations, a national ballot in support of the League which collected personal replies from over 10 million citizens. Far from being a pacifist ballot, well over half of those responding wanted the League to be able to take military action against aggressors.

The United Nations followed the League. Its Charter was signed in June 1945, before the end of World War Two. Its first aim was 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. In that task it has arguably failed, though in many others it has succeeded beyond expectation. Like the late, and equally UN minded, Erskine Childers, Gittings is sure that in so many areas – education, human rights, health and even the environment – much has been achieved. That more could have been done is only too true, but, granted the road blocks set up by the great powers in the Security Council, the General Assembly has perhaps too often felt itself to be incapable, or scared, of independent action.

Gittings is clear that, despite the failures, we have made substantial progress towards a world of peaceful citizenship under the rule of law. The obstacles in front of us are obvious. A conformist media willing to repeat any claim coming from political power, an arms industry which needs threats and fears to make its money, and a crude nationalism which prevents real internationalist thought.

As malign as ever is the 1947 nationalistic demand from Ernest Bevin, which took Britain down the nuclear weapon road. He had to have, he said, a nuclear weapon 'with a bloody great Union Jack on top'. Such crudity, then and now, makes for slow progress in what Gittings calls the Art of Peace.

*Bruce Kent*

## **This Day's Struggle**

**Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, *Seán MacBride: A Republican Life, 1904-1946*, Liverpool University Press 2011, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9781846316586, £65**

In 2012, for the first time in its history, the International Peace Bureau, the oldest international peace movement in the world, presented its annual Seán MacBride Peace Prize in Dublin. The medals were awarded by Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland. This ceremony showed how well regarded Seán MacBride is both internationally and within Ireland. So it

was with some pleasure that I looked forward to reviewing Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid's book on MacBride's early life, from 1904 to 1946.

The clear impression from her book is that the author does not like MacBride, Republicanism or Irish neutrality. So, while it is well written, there was no pleasure in reading *Seán MacBride: A Republican Life*. It is, in fact, just another in a long series of such books that seek to 'revise' Irish history by denigrating the Republican tradition that led the struggle against British imperialism. They provide an intellectual role in restoring imperial values as the Irish political élite actively integrate Ireland into the US/EU/NATO axis by ensuring Irish Army participation in the Afghan War, allowing millions of US troops to land at Shannon Airport, support for the NATO conquest of Libya, and its sanctions and threats of war on Iran.

In an Ireland dominated by British imperialism, where there was virtually total support for the Empire, with the only issue being if there was to be a degree of Home Rule within it, MacBride was born into a family that identified with the minority Irish Republican tradition that stretched back to the 1790s. MacBride's childhood in France, and where his parents separated, clearly had an impact on him for the rest of his life. The events between 1916 and 1918, including the 1916 Rising and the anti-conscription campaign, transformed Ireland and ensured the revitalisation of the Republican values as dominant in Ireland. MacBride took an active role in the united IRA struggle for national independence against the British Army of occupation. His father, Major MacBride, had been executed for his role in the Easter Rising, and his mother was Maud Gonne. These factors clearly facilitated his rise within the IRA's ranks, but his participation in the struggle was surely the key factor. The author frequently shows her own inclinations by referring to those supporting imperialism as being 'murdered' rather than 'killed'.

In 1922, the Treaty negotiated with the British Empire and accepted by *Dail Eireann* and a decisive majority of the people, was rejected by an IRA Army Convention. Despite serious efforts to avoid it, a civil war broke out, which MacBride supported as a prisoner. The execution of Republican prisoners left a bitter legacy. The fact that the war ended by an IRA ceasefire rather than by a negotiated peace agreement, as is correctly pointed out by the author, meant that the IRA never reconciled itself to the reality of the new democratic State.

In the aftermath of the civil war, Seán MacBride played a key role in rebuilding and sustaining the IRA, but it was an IRA that remained loyal to 'The Republic' that became more and more remote from the actual people, especially after the formation of Fianna Fail, the Republican Party. In fact,

well into the early 1930s, the IRA supported Fianna Fail, and many of its progressive members left to join, as did others who went in a different political direction with the formation of the Republican Congress, a short lived left-wing political grouping. By the end of the decade, what had been a military force of 17,000 in the early 1930s, had been reduced to a shattered organisation. Essentially, the overwhelming number of Republicans steadily came to accept Michael Collins' analysis, that the treaty provided a 'stepping stone' to the Republic, by participating in the democratic state it created.

In 1938, Seán MacBride, who had previously supported IRA political involvement via *Saor Eire* and *Cumann Poblachta*, which gained little support in the 1936 election, after a brief tenure as Chief of Staff, resigned from the IRA. A member of the IRA from the age of 16, he now entered the legal profession as a barrister where he defended IRA prisoners and civil liberties as well as civil cases between 1939-45, a period dominated by World War Two and Irish neutrality during that war.

All but one member of the *Dáil* supported Irish neutrality during the war, a political view, according to the author, 'which was of course in the German interests'. With this perspective, the author's suggestion that MacBride was/may have been pro the Nazis is suspect.

The reality is that virtually every state, including the United States, remained neutral until attacked, and to expect the Irish state to volunteer to fight shoulder to shoulder with the British Empire, which less than twenty years earlier had poured the Black & Tans into the country to apply state terror, was a political view verging on the bizarre. Indeed, as one would expect as being reasonable, the government's neutrality was in practice far more pro-British than pro-German, a position that reflected the views of the decisive majority of the people, even if there were those more in sympathy with the Germans, such as MacBride's mother.

The policy of neutrality was first advocated by Wolfe Tone, in 1790. When Fianna Fail, supported by Fine Gael and Labour, unlike the Home Rule Party, which supported imperialism during the 1914-18 war, advocated neutrality between 1939-45, it was advocating a value system that remains so strong, that the current FF/FG/Labour Party leadership have to declare their loyalty to it even as they destroy it.

By 1946, Seán MacBride had built up links with Fine Gael through the law courts and had established contact with the Labour Party, which was taking a more Republican position. His role in mobilising campaigns for clemency for IRA members, which stretched way beyond IRA membership, helped to build an anti-Fianna Fail alliance. The party he founded in 1946, *Clann na Poblachta*, played a key role in the formation

of an alternative government in 1948, thus eventually following Collins and De Valera into participation in the democratic state and the stepping stone to the Republic. By helping to create an alternative government to Fianna Fail he, in fact, played a key role in consolidating democracy.

That McBride, like Peadar O'Donnell, continued to support the concept of British withdrawal was, according to Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, a failure 'to recognise the inherent validity of the Ulster unionist identity', and his values 'appear increasingly irrelevant to contemporary observers'. Not to this reviewer, they don't. British imperialism is alive and well, supporting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more than willing to help launch others against Syria and Iran. MacBride remained an opponent of imperialism all his life. When it is finally defeated, he will rest more easily. Speed the day.

Roger Cole

[www.pana.ie](http://www.pana.ie)

### 'And no birds sing'

**Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, new edition with a Foreword by Caroline Lucas MP, Penguin Hardback Classics 2012, 352 pages, ISBN 9780141391526 £14.99**

Few people will know Keats's poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', but far more will know the famous line from it – 'And no birds sing'. It was in quoting these words that Rachel Carson, in 1962, gave the title of *Silent Spring* to this book, which completed her scientific studies of the fatal results in many parts of the United States of spreading chemical pesticides to control disease in animals and plants.

The impact of the book's publication was unprecedented for a detailed scientific inquiry. My wife was a doctor, and I can well remember her destroying all our supplies of DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) after reading the book when it came out in the United Kingdom, in 1963. DDT was Carson's main target among the chemical pesticides, and when I read Carson's book, I stopped spreading the chlordane weed killer I used to control the weeds on our lawns. The book had a big impact on our thinking, because, living on the edge of wooded hills, we were woken every morning by the dawn chorus, and at the front and back of the house we had bird tables, which attracted some thirty or more species of birds to feed on what we gave them.

Before I read Rachel Carson's book again, I had forgotten how beautifully it is written, not just the clarity of exposition of her argument, about the

conservation of variety, about pathogens, mutations and chromosome abnormality, about genetic effects, insect resistance and natural selection, as she moves from the examination of the damaging effects of chemical sprays to the alternatives of natural, biological controls. Even more telling are the phrases she employs to describe what she calls in different passages the ‘multi-coloured tide of life’, ‘the relentlessly pressing force by which nature controls her own’, ‘in the partnership – and fabric of life’, ‘against the dark tide of enemies’ in ‘the internecine war’, of ‘eons of unhurried time’.

What has happened in the fifty years since Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* is that many of the warnings which she gave us, and alternatives to chemical spraying which she proposed, have been heeded. But Caroline Lucas in her Foreword reminds us of ‘our failure to fully appreciate the complex and fragile relationship between ourselves and the planet’ and to resist adequately the power of the chemicals industry and agribusiness lobby, pulling levers at every level of government and drip feeding what Carson called ‘little tranquilising pills of half truth’; and Caroline, in the end, asks us, ‘What are we going to do to make change happen?’

Rachel Carson warned us of ‘the last and greatest danger to our civilisation’ – genetic deterioration through man-made agents, chemicals and radiation. She did not live to see the effects of ‘Agent Orange’, produced by several US chemical companies, and used by the US Forces in the Vietnam War to destroy the forest cover of the Viet Cong, which has left thousands of US soldiers debilitated and millions of Vietnamese and their offspring permanently damaged. But we, here and now, who have lived to recognise that disaster, still need ‘to make change happen’.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## The Future of European Welfare States

**Patrick Diamond and Guy Lodge, *European Welfare States after the Crisis: Changing Public Attitudes, Policy Network, Institute for Public Policy Research, The Foundation for European Progressive Studies, available to download ([www.policy-network.net](http://www.policy-network.net)), 15 pages***

Is entrenched support for the ‘traditional’ welfare state (‘pensions and healthcare’) a threat to the ‘new’ social investment policies in education, active labour markets and family assistance? A joint Policy Exchange and Institute for Public Policy paper, *European Welfare States after the Crisis*, makes this claim and identifies two challenges – continuing fiscal

austerity, and the emergence of new ‘clusters’ of long-term social disadvantage and inequality as the global economy polarises.

The paper recognises that the fiscal crisis and economic forces are driving down wages, reducing job security, and increasing precarious forms of employment, while boosting demand for higher educational qualifications. Significantly, it makes no reference to neo-liberalism! Crucially, the authors accept these developments and call for a redesign of the welfare state to address the economic needs of capital. This requires increased social investment in ‘children, human capital and making work pay’. In other words, the social investment strategy is designed to reform ‘the welfare state to adapt it to the new economic context by reorienting its spending towards “preparing” rather than “repairing”’ (Morel et al, 2009).

The paper assumes that people will increasingly be required to purchase health and social care insurance and pensions, which will be defined contribution schemes resulting in further elimination of the defined benefit model. In other words, people will select the level of insurance or pension contribution they are able or willing to pay and thus reduce demands on the welfare state. This will result in a key part of the welfare state being based on affordability and means-testing, instead of collective solidarity. The costs and consequences of allowing market forces to dictate the quality of and access to pensions, health and social care are conveniently ignored.

In-work poverty now outstrips workless poverty. The number of working-age adults in low-income, in-work households has increased by more than 20% in the last decade, whilst the proportion of pensioners in poverty declined. There were 4.4m jobs that paid less than £7 per hour in 2011. The number of working families receiving tax credits increased 50% to 3.3m between 2003-2012 (Aldridge et al, 2012).

More social (public) investment to ‘make work pay’ means increased state funding to compensate for low pay and benefits. Reliance on a social investment model of the welfare state will literally propel corporate welfare (public payments to increase companies’ profits) to a new zenith (Whitfield, 2012). Corporate welfare would extend from its current scope of financial and regulatory concessions, the contract services system and owner/operator infrastructure market, to comprehensive provision of ‘human capital’, with the associated ‘burdens’ becoming the responsibility of the state. The attack on pay, terms and working conditions continues, yet *European Welfare States after the Crisis* has no strategy to tackle private sector employers’ low pay tactics and their reliance on the state to subsidise employment.

Of course, publicly funded childcare and education, skills and lifetime learning, and tackling unemployment through active labour market policies

are vitally important. But the polarisation between personal needs and the needs of capital, and the branding of ‘old’ and ‘new’ welfare states, sets a false competition between the ‘old and young’, the middle class and the poor, ‘preparing’ rather than ‘repairing’, and ‘status quo or growth orientated’.

The paper raises the perennial reference to the public choice literature, accompanied by a box highlighting the claim that:

‘It is the middle-class who are the direct beneficiaries of social security entitlements; this makes pensions and welfare payments to older cohorts practically untouchable.’

The attack on universalism in the welfare state continues, with entitlements increasingly narrowed to specific groups of the ‘deserving poor’. The role of the state is being reduced in funding and provision, for example, by personalising risk and responsibility via new charges, fees and vouchers, and the promotion of individual budgets and direct payments. Public service networks are being fractured by opting out (academies and free schools), with other services transferred to arms length companies and trusts to form a staging post to full privatisation.

Increased outsourcing and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) run parallel to expanding private sector delivery of public services, to strengthen markets and embed market forces. Support for social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives to transfer work from the public sector is coupled with commercialisation of voluntary organisations by encouraging their participation in commissioning. Meanwhile, private ownership and control of the economic and social infrastructure continues apace, with secondary market trading of PPP equity ensuring more public assets are managed by offshore tax havens. Social investment bonds with payment by results are a new method to replace public provision.

Democratic governance continues to be eroded. ‘Commercially confidential’ procurement processes, the centralisation of decision-making within local government, and the increasing role of business interests in the public policy making process sever channels of accountability.

These and similar policies constitute the financialisation, personalisation, marketisation and privatisation of public services and the welfare state (Whitfield, 2012). *European Welfare States after the Crisis* does not recognise any of these policies, let alone consider them a ‘challenge’. The reason perhaps lies in the fact that these policies, designed mainly by the last Labour government and accelerated by the Coalition, are intended to privatise the ‘old’ welfare state in order to release public money to more fully address the casualties of, and the needs of, capital.



*European Welfare States after the Crisis* draws on an online opinion poll of a sample of adults in the United Kingdom, France and Denmark in August 2012. The public must have a key role in engaging in the debate over the future of the welfare state, but opinion polls are only one means of assessing views. Reliance on polls in a period of austerity could significantly bias the debate about the role of the welfare state for future generations. Furthermore, there needs to be real options rather than general questions asking whether people want more or less public expenditure on different services, or whether the current welfare system provides, or does not provide, ‘sufficient protection’ for the unemployed, having a child, getting sick or disabled, or retiring from work. The paper avoids examining the impact of ‘recalibrating’ the welfare state’s ‘old’ and ‘new’ roles. It also avoids the debate about taxation, and does not address the much-needed democratisation of the welfare state and public services.

*European Welfare States after the Crisis* does, however, maintain that effective policies are needed, both at the national level and within the key European Union institutions. It is vitally important that these policies are founded in a radical and rigorous analysis of different European welfare state models, a holistic assessment of future individual and collective needs, and a funder/provider role for the state.

*Dexter Whitfield*

## References

- Aldridge, H., Kenway, P., MacInnes, T. and Parekh, A. (2012) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2012*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation,  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/MPSE%202012%20Bookmarked%20REVISED.pdf>
- Morel, N., Palier, B. and Palme, J. (2009) *What Future for Social Investment?* Institute for Futures Studies, Stockholm
- Whitfield, D (2012) *In Place of Austerity: Reconstruction of the state, economy and public services*, Spokesman Books, Nottingham.

## ‘Creditism’

**Richard Duncan, *The New Depression – The Breakdown of the Paper Money Economy*, John Wiley & Sons, 190 pages, hardback ISBN 9781118157994, £19.99**

Socialist economists have frequently explored the seeming dynamic nature of capitalism with its profusion of goods and services, its branding of

commodities to foster that 'must have' desire, so quickly overtaken by an improved version or the latest fashion whim. In this context we have to ask why the crash of 2008 was so long in coming given the fact that, relatively speaking, wages for the working class in most of the advanced countries have at best stagnated, and at worst reduced to dependency on welfare payments. How was it possible to sustain this consumption binge for so long? Part of the answer must surely be the increased availability of credit which, together with the deregulation of both national and international finance, has led to huge indebtedness, of which the sub-prime débâcle is the most telling example. This book describes and explains the history of this credit tsunami, and it was a tsunami for, according to Richard Duncan, as of 30 June 2011, the total size of the US credit market was some \$52.6 trillion. The text does concentrate on the US economy, but also makes clear that this credit expansion (along with its residuum debt) was not just an American phenomenon, and that the printing of fiat money was a generalised occurrence as a mechanism to sustain growth in most of the advanced countries.

For Duncan this credit boom is caused by the behaviour of central banks, under governmental guidance, not only to use the printing presses but also the extension of credit in other ways. Here in the United Kingdom we are familiar with quantitative easing (QE); in the United States they have TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) as well. For the author the debt problems of the system, governmental, personal and commercial, will not now be put right by the summary halting of the monetary flow and neither will the situation be alleviated by the employment of fiscal and welfare austerity. Duncan maintains that the US Federal Reserve's pumping of \$4.5 trillion into the economy after 2008 was the reason why the world narrowly avoided a 1930s style meltdown. This compensated for a consumer spending reduction over the same period of some \$2.7 trillion. A re-elected Obama now has plans for higher taxes (deservedly, the increases will be on incomes over \$1 million) and, more importantly, reductions in government spending, falling into line with the UK and the European Union. The author agrees that welfare austerity is never going to overcome the present problems, and his recent thinking is that it may not be politically possible in a parliamentary democracy, as the latest elections in both Italy and Japan seem to show. Hopefully, he is correct.

Duncan offers three possible scenarios, but the one that he is arguing for is where the US government redirects monies from QE and the defence budget into a crash programme to develop nanotechnology and renewable energy. This would not only get the economy moving again, but also release the nation from the grip of 'unsavoury' foreign oil producers and re-establish the US globally at the forefront of the new technology. Quoting Roosevelt,

what the author hopes for is a 'new' New Deal but, as he mentions, was it the New Deal that dragged the US out of depression, or was it the strengthening of those tendencies, already present, towards a permanent war economy? Certainly the trillions spent on 'defence' have become a stable feature of the American economy and, unsurprisingly perhaps, a corollary of this is the fact that America has managed to have at least one foreign war going on for most of the period since 1941. The state of the US and global economy may be influenced more by the powerful military-industrial complex, as Eisenhower warned, than the vagaries of Duncan's monetarist 'quantity theory of money' or his innovation, the 'quantity theory of credit'.

*The New Depression* has a singular theory that the present impasse is caused primarily by the printing of too much fiat money, the deregulation of international financial markets by governments, and the end of the dollar's connection with gold reserves. The latter process was set in motion by the Johnson Administration with the attempt to defend the dollar by the use of Special Drawing Rights but, by February 1973, the Bretton-Woods agreement was nullified and replaced with a floating international currency regime. Much of this manoeuvring, it is worth recalling, was intimately connected with the financial costs of the Vietnam War.

Apart from the 'new' New Deal, which Duncan modestly thinks will not be taken up by our leaders, he paints two other possible outcomes to the present malaise. The US could let the markets rip, cease to feed the system through more credit, let the weak financial institutions go to the wall, and generally not do what they did after Lehman's collapse – resulting in war, social turmoil and upheaval on an international scale. The second alternative is what he thinks will happen, namely, a continuing drip feeding of credit when the situation seems cataclysmic, otherwise the management of economic stagnation. How long this situation could go on for, he would not like to say, but there would come a point when the worst scenario would come about.

Duncan does not favour a return to gold, but it is interesting to note that several nations are buying up gold, as a definite policy decision, including Germany, Iran, China and Russia. Over the last few years, its price has reached dizzy heights. These nations fear a currency war or/and the collapse of international trade, which is a real possibility if the paramount global reserve currency, the dollar, and its partner the euro, find themselves in real trouble, owing to increased competition between the currencies.

Finally, we must take issue with the author that capitalism as a system is no longer with us and has been replaced with what he calls 'creditism'. It is true that the kind of capitalism that Duncan describes in his book is no longer with us, and probably hasn't been since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

the leopard may have changed its spots, but it is still a leopard. *The New Depression* fails to engage with the monopolistic nature of the multinational companies that bestride our planet, with the socialist theory of capitalist crisis, or to see the world-embracing hegemonic role of the US and its stake in global inequality. It is an interesting book, however, crammed with tables and statistics, together with insights into the economic policy of the US and the mind-set of Ben Bernanke. It is definitely worth a read if you have the opportunity and the time.

*John Daniels*

## Socialist Register

**Leo Panitch, Greg Albo and Vivek Chibber (editors), *The Question of Strategy: Socialist Register 2013*, Merlin Press, 320 pages, ISBN 9780850366310, £16.95**

The 2013 edition of *Socialist Register* is titled *The Question of Strategy*. However, because of the themes which this edition addresses, it could be titled ‘What is to be Done?’ The editors have designed this volume in conjunction with the *Registers* for 2011 and 2012. The aim of those two volumes was to analyze the global financial and economic crisis. The 2013 volume extends that analysis, but offers a more concentrated focus on the ‘choices faced by the Left today, the models of strategy available to it, and the innovations that are being made by groups as they organize in diverse settings’. (SR2013, p.ix)

The editors’ preface is particularly appropriate. It offers the reader a guide through the nineteen essays which make up the volume, but it also draws the important political lessons from recent political history, and offers a conjunctural analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of post-2007 opposition to the continuing neo-liberal assault. It notes, firstly, that mobilizations against the neo-liberal solution have, ‘for the first time since the 1980s, put the question of capitalism back on the political agenda’, and secondly, that class politics are beginning to exercise their power. The power of neo-liberalism is confronting ‘the ninety-nine percent’ (pp.ix-x). The weaknesses of the Left are noted; firstly, the limitations of political organizational forms, including European social democratic parties, trades unions and Leninist parties, limit the responses available; secondly, the enduring strength of the capitalist state has contributed to the failure of the Left to analyze adequately a response. The editors write:

‘For now, in this world, the hard reality is that capitalism is in economic crisis, but politically secure – even if some regimes are experiencing instability.’ (p.xi).

The essays in *The Question of Strategy* address three related themes, drawing from a wide range of actual historical global experiences. One is to contrast the practices and ideas of ‘horizontalism’ – mass, popular movements and anti-bureaucratic activism such as the ‘occupy’ and ‘uncut’ – with traditional forms of organization such as political parties and trades unions. Social democratic governments across Europe are seen by many, active in the ‘movements’, as part of the problem, failing to contribute acceptable solutions. In addition, Left activism in response to the crisis of capital during the late 1960s to mid-1970s has not left a lasting legacy, it is contended. More recent examples include countries such as Egypt where mass movements have played an important role in opposing or removing reactionary governments but have, so far, failed to consolidate a continuing political solution.

A second theme focuses on the relevance and success (or not) of European style parliamentarism in contrast with Leninist models of political organization. Charles Post defends the Leninist model, as it was conceived and functioned in Russia before 1923, and argues that detractors either draw on the Stalinist (post-1923) practice or confuse Leninism with Blanquism. The model offered in the essays by Charles Post and Michael Lebowitz argues that the party of Lenin emerged in synchronicity with the actions of workers and peasants and sought to co-ordinate their diverse activity into a coherent political project; the revolutionary party should lead through its consistent practice, gaining leadership because of its organic links with the working class.

The third theme considers the continuing relevance and importance of recognising whether ‘the state’ should be at the heart of socialist theory and practice. The modern history of European labour movements has witnessed the combination of parliamentarism and extra-parliamentary struggle, which succeeded in building the social state with direct taxation at its core. The recent historical failure to defend the importance of fair and direct taxation for social need has allowed the argument to move to a focus on the individual and to be characterised as unfair taxation. Opponents of the shared burden of taxation have pulled on this loose thread in the centre of the network of social provision, to the detriment of social provision and the ideas which underpin it. Neo-liberal theorists and politicians do not mistakenly ignore the state. They have taken advantage of the political conjuncture, including the general silence of the Left, to employ the state to secure their advantage. Private finance initiatives, public private partnerships, and privatisations are state aided strategies that subsidise capitalism.

Greg Albo's opening essay, 'The Crisis and Economic Alternatives', reprises and examines the principal arguments, including the approach adopted in France under the leadership of François Hollande. He elaborates the continuing strength of the global neo-liberal approach and considers the failure to develop a viable alternative. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) remains overwhelmingly committed to the Blairite accommodation with neo-liberalism. Critical voices offer only mild variations to 'austerity', and none offers a vision which leads beyond capitalism. The PLP strategy is mainly limited to rejecting government policies. Meanwhile, outside Parliament, public demonstrations called by the Trade Union Congress engage millions. The ideological power of parliamentary democracy and of the wider economic system continues to exercise its influence. The capitalist state, Sam Gindin writes, 'constitutes a specific field of political power and struggle; it cannot be evaded in strategizing exits from the crisis' (p.19). An effective strategy requires the Left to build the struggle in workplaces and communities, 'institutionalizing and collectivizing struggles while deepening democratic controls' (p.19). His essay, 'Rethinking Unions, Registering Socialism', suggests that the dominant practice of the Left is to revert to economic reasoning and assume that every economic crisis erupts into a crisis of the state, whereas the state is a complex economic, political and social formation, transformation of which requires multiple ruptures.

It is immaterial how many national demonstrations or general strikes are organised. As Eli Zaretsky says in his essay, 'Reconsidering the American Left', 'it is not enough to say "no" ... an accumulation of loudly screamed no's' is never sufficient if they fail to represent actual challenges to the hegemony of the state in all of its dispersed forms (p.346). Proletarian demands for democracy, in communities and workplaces, have never been more relevant.

*Malcolm Ball*

## **Pecuniary Temptation**

**Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism*, a new edition with a Foreword by Polly Toynbee, 446 pages, Alma Classics 2012, hardback ISBN 9781847492432, £12.99**

This famous book of Shaw's was first published in 1927, with a revised edition published by Penguin in 1937, when it was that I first read it.

Seventy-five years later, it reads with remarkable relevance for our own times, as Polly Toynbee makes clear in her excellent Foreword. We suffer from even more inequality in our society, and between societies, today than existed then. Shaw's advocacy of Socialism seems even more necessary; his dismissal of seven possible alternatives even more conclusive. The seven were, respectively, payment by productive results, payment by deserts, payment by what can be grabbed, payment to the chosen few, payment by class membership, payment of what is enough, and laissez-faire. That left the Socialist belief in income equality to be argued, and the rest of Shaw's book contains the argument.

Shaw first examines a series of objections to equal pay. The first is that it is abnormal. But, in fact, he shows that it is quite normal: most people doing the same work for the same wage, whatever their age, colour, background or ability, and there should be none of the sex discrimination that exists. (You still have to say that, ninety years later.) Secondly, Shaw raises the question of incentive to work harder or better, or on dirty or unpleasant jobs. He argues that there is much pleasure, not just more money, to be found in doing good work. Dirty jobs should be made clean and the unpleasant nature of many jobs, done regularly by highly regarded people like surgeons, has to be accepted as part of the job, for which there is no special pay. Finally, Shaw warns against what we call 'workaholics'. Too much work does no one any good.

Shaw's next set of questions is about the possibly dangerous results of income equality. The first is, rather interestingly in our present world, that of over-population. He can easily show that countries with more equal incomes have lower population growth rates. Shaw then shifts the argument to the distinction of different kinds of Socialism – Utopian, Anarchist, Syndicalist, Theocratic, Owenite, Scientific, Marxist, Communist, Bolshevik, Fabian – and states categorically that the basic test is whether they truly believe in equality, not just of opportunity but of fact. And this implies not just a question of personal righteousness but of Government powers of employment, and that demands a major onslaught on Capitalism. This takes up a large part of the book, since Shaw believed that only by understanding Capitalism can we hope to build Socialism; hence the inclusion of Capitalism in the book's title.

Understanding capitalism involves consideration of all that we now do in our lives, shopping, paying taxes, rates and rents, investing at home and abroad, exporting, imperialism and war. Each is given a chapter, with the moral steadily drawn that what we do is all driven by the lure of money; what Shaw calls 'pecuniary temptation'. Socialism, Shaw believed, would encourage seeking economic advantage for the whole community, not just

profit for the individual. Writing for the 'intelligent woman', Shaw is particularly concerned at the weak position of women in the labour market. He sees capitalism running away into disaster, but holds out some hope from those in the 'middle station in life' – professional people like himself – and from the revolt of what he calls 'the parasitic proletariat', who have to be supplied with doles for the unemployed, cheap loans for the capitalists, to prevent the whole system from collapsing. That sounds familiar!

Thus, Shaw is led to consider the ways of advancing Socialism. He rules out all forms of confiscation of capital, as counter-productive, and insists that changes must be Parliamentary. But this involves some close thinking about the nature of British democracy with universal suffrage, and the need for authority in government. Shaw makes a very important observation – that authority is not resented, provided that it is 'beneficially and tactfully exercised'. This exercise is very far from mental laziness, but implies 'tutelage in established creeds and codes' in society. Equality of incomes, Shaw insists, would generate mutual trust, but he recognises the continuing need for managerial ability that the Soviet Union lacked for so long.

When Shaw comes, in the last thirty pages, to consider the final two forms of government in the book's title, Sovietism and Fascism, his judgements are much briefer. His summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet Union, revised in 1937, is short and brilliant. The strengths are perhaps a little exaggerated. The defeat of the invasion forces was certainly remarkable, and Trotsky is given his due. The following sentence: 'At present, there is not a hungry child in the fully Sovietised regions of Russia, nor a ragged one, nor one who is not getting all the education it is capable of,' may seem a bit strong. But nothing like that could be said of the UK then or, perhaps, even now, in Russia or in the United Kingdom. Shaw fully recognised the need for Lenin's New Economic Policy and the introduction of American methods of industrialisation with American engineers.

When Shaw visited the Soviet Union, in 1931, he was not only surprised at the warmth of his reception, but at the fact that in Russia, 'mistakes are not hushed up, they are attacked and remedied with uncompromising vigour, for there are no capitalist vested interests to be conciliated'. That was certainly Lenin's legacy. Stalin's was another matter, which Shaw neglects, although, by 1937, Stalin's 'Socialism in one country' meant grave mistakes and the exile and, ultimately, the murder of Trotsky. Shaw's final chapter on Fascism is even shorter than that on Sovietism. Shaw sees very clearly the hopelessness of 'the little minorities', Liberals, Republicans, Trade Unionists, Co-operatives, Socialists, Bolsheviks, Anarchists, Syndicalists, Free thinkers, currency cranks, Salvationists, etc,



until ‘the multitude of ordinary people can be politically organised’. Some people will always be attracted by the pageantry, the apparent popular unity, the military displays and the ‘little wars’, ‘the bread and circuses’ that are freely on offer, as in Ancient Rome, to cover up the violence of dictatorship. But this, he concludes, is only ‘the latest mark of Capitalism’.

Shaw ends with a splendid peroration which, in Polly Toynbee’s words, reveals all Shaw’s ‘clarity of argument and caustic wit’. With equality of income, he writes,

‘the coveted distinction of lady and gentleman, instead of being the detestable parasitic pretension that it is at present, meaning persons who never condescend to do anything for themselves that they can possibly put on others without rendering them equivalent service ... will at last take on a simple and noble meaning, and be brought within the reach of every able bodied person ... For such ladies and their sons can the human race be saved, and not otherwise.’

For one lady and her son in 1937, the lesson was learned, never to be forgotten.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## **What about Democracy?**

**Aron Acemoglu & James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Profile Books 2013, 560 pages, hardback ISBN 9781846684302, £25**

This is a fascinating book, recommended on the first pages by a whole list of Nobel Laureates and famous professors including Fukuyama. What more could you ask for? But, at 560 pages, including 67 pages of sources and index, I have to say that I found it heavy reading as well as heavy to hold in my hands.

The theme is outlined in the first 120 pages, and summarised in the last 35. So, that is perhaps what the Nobel Laureates looked at. The theme is certainly important, and a valuable addition to historiography. It is that the political and economic development of societies depend on institutions that ensure a relatively wide distribution of resources among the population. Power, prosperity and poverty among nations depend, not on the climate, geography or racial origins of the peoples, but on the different national institutions. These are distinguished by the authors as falling primarily into two categories: first, the extractive, extracting wealth for a small élite from productive activity, often the production of commodities for export; and,

secondly, the more distributive institutions that spread the wealth from production around more equally. How these differences occurred is the subject of the middle chapters, which jump between the Neolithic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution with somewhat surprising incidence. The authors invoke what they call certain 'critical junctures' in societies' development that produced revolutionary changes. Some of these, like the discovery of fire and of metals in the rocks, or the Black Death or the wind that broke up the Spanish Armada, can be attributed to chance. Others, like the discovery of America by the Europeans, or the voyages of Captain Cook, and the understanding of the atom, are not so easily categorised within the authors' compass. Indeed, I find the authors' concept of a 'critical juncture' an evasion. In none of the cited cases was there a specific crisis, which was being joined by events that resolved it or rescued it. Political and economic revolutions leading to institutional change have emerged from much longer periods of evolutionary change, rather than from a momentary crisis. None the less, the examples which the authors give in the body of the book of revolutions, most particularly the Russian and probably the Chinese revolutions, that failed to sustain an institutional change and thereby narrowed the distribution of resources, are very telling.

The emergence of an enriched élite and growing inequality has been, only too often, the sad story of national economic success resulting in the concentration of political power, and in the failure of continuing development with growing poverty because wealth has not been distributed more widely. The current economic crisis in the US, UK and Europe is but the most recent and most obvious example. Earlier examples are cited throughout the book; from the Roman Empire, Venice, the Dutch East Indies, the African slave trade, the Mayas and Incas, and so many modern African economies. The lesson that remains is a challenging one; it is nothing less than the need to change the leadership of the most powerful political and economic organisations of the nation states and build community power from below, creating new and sustainable institutions which distribute power widely. Easier said than done!

Co-operatives of one kind or another must be the answer, but within a wider framework of international co-operation. Our two authors are not very specific when it comes to looking into the future. But they do emphasise several key elements of a more distributive egalitarian society in place of the 'iron law of oligarchy'. First among these elements they put the rule of law, which all citizens equally must respect. The second is, perhaps surprisingly, the sanctity of property rights and land ownership. Only someone who lives in today's Zimbabwe could fully understand that.

State expenditure rates low, depending on what public funds are spent on.

What is strangely missing in our two authors' prescription is any mention of political, let alone economic, democracy, the right freely and openly to vote for your rulers, nationally, locally or at work. Whatever weaknesses there may be in democratic practice, and there are many, and, while the history of early democratic struggles in the USA and the UK are well described at the beginning of the book, the absence of a democratic requirement in a distributive, less extractive, society (the word 'democracy' does not even appear in the Index) must make the whole book hard to comprehend as the whole story.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## A Miner's Life

**Bryan Robson, *The Freedom to Roam Without Fear*, 66 pages, available from the author, 2 Wikegate Grove, Thorne, Doncaster DN8 5 HP, England, £5.00 including postage**

It is not often that a piece of work comes into one's hands that is written by a working man about his life, and in this case it is by a coal miner from Yorkshire. Bryan Robson had the benefit of three years on a Miners' Day Release Course, but apart from that he is self-educated and spent his life in Hatfield Main pit. Harry Barnes, until recently a Derbyshire MP, and I had the privilege of teaching him as members of the Sheffield University extra-mural department in the 1970s. What one will learn from this life is a story of the remarkable strengths of a working class community, and perhaps especially a mining community. It is now astonishing to read that house doors were never locked, nor clothes lockers, nor allotment huts. Stealing was unheard of. When anyone was ill or having a baby, neighbours would take turns to do the necessary shopping, cooking and cleaning. During strikes, the miners' wives support groups were essential to the solidarity of the Movement. I often wished that we had miners' wives on our day release courses, but, as the Coal Board was paying the fees, that was impossible. When I became the Principal of the Northern College, we attracted wives of miners and other trade unionists to the College.

Bryan Robson has given to his book a title which reveals something else, besides community solidarity, that has been lost – freedom to roam the streets and the countryside without fear of personal attack or danger from cars. I can remember such a time in my childhood in Oxfordshire, but it is long gone. Bryan grew up in a large extended family of relatives and it is sometimes hard

for the reader to keep up with all the aunts and uncles and cousins, let alone their forebears and children and friends. The sense of a true community pervades the book, though Bryan's study of his family history shows that they came from Durham, Scotland, and even Ireland, as well as Yorkshire. Bryan became a NUM branch officer, finally President, with special responsibilities for health and safety. His relations with management are always interesting, sometimes friendly, sometimes acrimonious, even devious, but always driven by a powerful sense of justice. Bryan was often exhausted by his duties. He quotes an interview with me, when I recommended he go a bit easier or he would have a breakdown. In the end he did have a stroke, and took early retirement. The last chapter reveals a perfect understanding of the divisive and inegalitarian results of Thatcherism, inherited by Blair and Brown, and continued by the Coalition Government.

Bryan acknowledges help from several friends in the writing of his book. It's just a pity that no one tightened up his sentence structure and checked his spelling, because his story is so readable that the occasional mistakes are all the more jarring. I only regret that his remarkable wife, Kathleen (charming picture of them both on page 34), did not come to study at the Northern College.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## The Week

***The Week*, A weekly digest of British and foreign media, Dennis Publishing Ltd, £2.90**

It is perhaps inevitable, given the dominance over the British media of the Right, and the general partisanship of world media, that *The Week* tends to reflect a perception rather familiar to readers of *The Spokesman*. In Britain, for example, no less than five out of the eight mainstream national newspapers – *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mail*, *Express* and *The Sun* – bombard the public with neo-liberal and Establishment commentaries and ideology.

Offering these preliminary remarks as a proviso, *The Week* none the less gives an informative narrative of current affairs in which progressive and left-leaning aspects gleam through. It is instructive to see the staple stodge of right-wing commentary so edifyingly presented. A particular strength of *The Week* lies in its summation of the foreign media – though perhaps a shade too much emphasis on the United States – an extremely useful distillation of reporting, filling an enormous hole in the wasteland that is

our notoriously xenophobic press. It is scarcely surprising, even in this age of the internet, that the general British reader knows little about the world beyond these shores; and not least when we passed, recently, the appalling milestone that more than 50% of internet traffic is pornography.

For capitalist watchers, the City section will either delight or dismay. It is a superb summation of what often reads like the report of a crime syndicate. But then the ultimate free market *is* criminality. This has a powerful, cumulative, educational effect.

All in all, *The Week* is worth a dip. There is a tempter – an introductory offer – should you wish to succumb. Remember Oscar Wilde!: ‘I couldn’t help it. I can resist everything except temptation’ (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*).

*Stephen Jackson*

## Flashbacks

**Andreï Makine, *Brief Loves that Live Forever*, translated from the French by Geoffrey Strachan, MacLehose Press, London, 2013, 192 pages, hardback ISBN 9780857051769, £12**

*Brief Loves that Live Forever* has many flashbacks. The first person narrator is an orphan growing up in Soviet Russia during the 1960s. Each chapter examines different stages of his life, which he spends with different women. Each of these loves had a certain impact on the main character (whose name remains unknown throughout) and stays in his memory forever. The first and last chapters focus on the life of Dmitri Ress. Dmitri is a friend of the main character, and his life signifies very well the point Makine appears to be trying to make. Dmitri is a political activist, fighting for freedom, who is locked up by the regime he is fighting against. He is unable to be with the woman he loves. In that sense his fight for freedom and his need for love are interdependent. But this woman does not reciprocate Dmitri’s love. She marries one of the leaders of the Communist Party, and has his children. Dmitri never forgets her, and regularly watches her during the celebrations of May Day and the October Revolution. All in all, I can recommend *Brief Loves that Live Forever*, especially to readers who love imagery and a poetic style of writing. They will enjoy this translation of Makine’s novel.

*Monica Hochbauer*