

# Reviews

## Opening Gaza

**Dervla Murphy, *A Month by the Sea – Encounters in Gaza*, Eland Publishing, 2013, 224 pages, hardbackk ISBN £16.99**

Imagine swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, tax-free shopping, floodlit dancing on the beach, and wine-fuelled evenings. Several centuries ago, travellers compared this destination to Paris for culture and economic importance as it stood at the crossroads of exotic trade routes between Europe, Africa and the Orient.

Can we really be talking about Gaza?

Your heart may sink at the mention of this besieged, open sewer of a prison, but allow the name Dervla Murphy to let it soar again. She doesn't do misery memoirs. Her crazy antics, razor-sharp intelligence and quirky take on everyone and thing she encounters make the armchair traveller gasp for breath at times.

Dervla has cycled to India, trekked across Ethiopia with a mule, even fallen under the mesmeric effect of an Ian Paisley sermon in the Black North of her native Ireland. So the little matter of a conflict in the Middle East isn't going to feeze her.

Murphy, now in her 80s, travelled to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to research what she conceived as one book, but the month she spent in Gaza made her dash off this stand-alone work urgently, and it is gripping. She shows the Gazans in all their steadfastness (*sumud/samoud*), hospitality and general charm. But she doesn't flinch at describing the Puritanism, narrow-mindedness, and the distortions of Qur'anic texts also in evidence there.

What struck me most was her firm grasp of the conflict in all its complexity and her total refusal to be cowed into fashionable impartiality. She excoriates Israel, taking a sideswipe at Blair and Bush on the way.

'The Zionists have always wanted the whole of Palestine. A just peace doesn't interest them.' And 'I prefer to argue that natural justice is on the side of any people whose land has been stolen by armed robbers, or invaded by powerful alliances using specious excuses ('spreading democracy') to install puppet governments in strategically interesting regions.'

US 'stooge' Ban Ki Moon and 'compliant' Mahmoud Abbas don't fare much better. And she sticks up for Hamas in a big way for all its 'flavour

of dictatorship’, as preferable to the way the Palestinian Authority rules the West Bank.

‘To me this tasted less unsavoury than the PA’s collusion with Israel, which coexists with open IDF [Israeli Defence Force] support for ever-increasing settler aggression.’

On Hamas’ disastrous suicide bombing campaign she writes:

‘... you can better understand one wrong (suicide bombers occasionally indiscriminately murdering Israeli civilians) if you never lose sight of the other (Israelis daily terrorising and often murdering Palestinian civilians all over the OPT).’

She writes of Hamas’ high-mindedness, which means bribery doesn’t work, and of the health care and education it provides, in stark contrast to the perceived corruption of the Palestinian Authority. She points out that the ‘manic’ Hamas charter is never quoted by its leaders, and counsels them to ditch it.

We get insights into the careers of Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi and Sheikh Yassin, both murdered by Israel. The Sheikh – who died in his wheelchair on the way to the Mosque – was a ‘tireless worker’ for the poor.

‘Not long before his death he looked ahead to the IDF’s 2005 withdrawal [from Gaza] and suggested power-sharing with Fatah on the Strip. A leader so openly focused on “peace with justice” could only be a serious embarrassment to governments having a very different agenda. The Bush administration openly approved of the murder of Hamas’ top layer.’

She meets Hamas leader Mahmoud al Zahar:

‘Politically I’m on your side but as a European woman Hamas is not where I belong.’

He chuckled and they never looked back.

‘On some issues my host and I were in perfect harmony. I could detect no taint of anti-Semitism in him ... Dr Al Zahar enjoys history and we spent an hour or so mulling over happier times – when, for instance, Muslims and Jews flourished together on the Iberian peninsula before the Christians intervened. And likewise in Baghdad, for millennia, until political Zionism’s poisonous fumes came wafting across the desert from Palestine.’

But her clear eyes see the stifling of women’s lives in Gaza. We read of a dreadful case of forced marriage, so-called ‘honour killings’, and mixed summer camps which are deliberately wrecked.

On the beach one day she reflects:

‘Nobody could be scandalised by the sight of bare-headed little girls making sand castles.’

But apparently they are.

The dreadful effects of ‘Cast Lead’ – the turkey shoot in which 1,300 Gazans died in 2008-9 – are detailed. We remember the toddlers clinging to their dead mothers for days while Israeli Defence Force soldiers prevented ambulances access, but did we know of ‘melted brains, shredded lungs, cooked livers and exploded kidneys’ which resulted from white phosphorus and thermobaric bombs? She writes:

‘While ambulances were being denied access ... IDF graffiti artists were having fun. Within yards of their dead and dying victims – within earshot of the latter’s desperate cries – they spray-painted those houses still standing. ARABS NEED 2 DIE – DIE YOU ALL – 1 IS DOWN, 999,999 TO GO – ARABS 1948-2009.’

Her insightful Gazan guide, Nita, said:

‘Those soldiers are sick. They’re worse damaged than us though we’re more hurt.’

The Gazan spirit shines through the acute observation and the variety of people we meet – for example, Gazans cultivate the very sand dunes using dew. And I love the chapter where this tiny octogenarian visits what she calls ‘Tunnelopolis’. She persuades a customs officer – yes, the underground network is policed and you pay taxes on what you can smuggle through from Egypt – to let her swing down into one of the notorious tunnels. Typically, she admires the handsome vaulting of the roofs.

Murphy offers no slick solutions but she does offer us some hope for the survival of Gazans in the form of *samoud*.

‘This is a Palestinian quality not understood by Zionists, comprised of courage, obstinacy and a calm sort of pride. The IDF have weaponry, the Palestinians have *samoud*.’

*Sharen Green*

## Stolen Party

**Lewis Minkin, *The Blair Supremacy: A study in the politics of Labour’s party management*, Manchester University Press, 2014, 864 pages, hardback ISBN 9780719073793, £90, paperback ISBN 9780719073809, £30**

Although the Labour Party had long been subject to overall management

from its headquarters at Transport House – backed, in the post-war period by the dominance of right-wing led trade unions – the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader in 1994 ushered in a completely new era of centralised control.

Previously, despite the fact that parliamentary candidates and applicants for party posts were subject to political vetting, only a small minority were excluded. In this book, Lewis Minkin quotes Ron Hayward and Joyce Gould, who were appointed as National Agent and Assistant National Agent respectively, as examples of individuals who were put in key positions despite a left-wing background. Although some left-wingers were not endorsed as parliamentary candidates, many others were accepted over the years.

The advent of New Labour, however, marked a decisive change of atmosphere. In his first speech as leader, to the Labour Party Conference in 1994, Tony Blair announced that he would be proposing a new, up-to-date statement of Party objectives. Totally disregarding the approval by Conference of a resolution reaffirming support for Clause IV and, therefore, of common ownership, the new leader used the party machine to conduct a campaign for its abolition and replacement by some other totally uninspiring words.

Over the succeeding years, Conference was progressively downgraded. The Conference Arrangements Committee was dominated by Blairite loyalists who determined that unwelcome resolutions were rarely given time for debate. Thirty resolutions against the privatisation of air traffic control, for example, were excluded on the grounds that it was referred to in a sentence in a commission report. By 1996, many of the resolutions debated had been instigated by the party machine. On pensions, the re-nationalisation of rail, and defence, including the scrapping of Trident, deals were arranged to get rid of resolutions which the leadership opposed. Along with Conference, the powers of the National Executive Committee were also reduced.

Insistence on the selection of women delegates to Annual Conference meant that 80% of delegates were first-timers by 1994. These could more easily be dominated by party officials. Speakers were carefully selected; Cabinet Ministers were given pride of place in speeches from the platform; party staff were organised to lead the applause from the floor. Policy making, meanwhile, was hived off to the National Policy Forum, which never functioned particularly effectively, anyway.

Inevitably, as the powers of Conference declined, attendance fell away. Only 500 of 641 constituencies sent delegates to Conference in 2004. This

was further reduced to 465 in 2008, 444 in 2009, and 412 in 2010.

The Party centre also increasingly played a part in the selection of parliamentary candidates. Although in rare cases such as those of Katy Clark in North Ayrshire and Linda Reardon in Halifax, left-wing candidates were adopted, the character of the Parliamentary Party was inexorably moved to the right as a result of the leadership's policy on selections. By 2005 most Labour MPs were professional politicians. Only 38 had served as manual workers.

The character of the European Parliamentary Labour Party was also changed. When Tony Blair took over as leader and proposed to ditch Clause IV of the Party constitution, a majority of the EPLP came out against this and placed an advertisement in *The Guardian* to this effect when Blair was due to speak at an EPLP meeting in Strasbourg. A decision was therefore taken by the leadership to impose a system of proportional representation for the 1999 European elections, with closed regional lists for large multi-member constituencies. A selection board, composed of the General Secretary, five NEC members, two others nominated by the NEC, and three from the region, allocated each nominee a position on the regional list. Only loyalists were allocated winnable positions so that the new EPLP, though reduced in size from 62 to 29 members, was cleared of left-wingers.

When it came to the decision to go to war, in association with the United States, against Iraq, the crucial speech justifying intervention was made by Tony Blair in Chicago. The Party management never allowed members to vote on whether or not there should be military action in the absence of UN authorisation. Even the Cabinet was not involved in decision-making on the war. Despite massive public opposition and the fact that 139 Labour MPs voted against military action, overwhelming Conservative support in the House of Commons guaranteed Blair his victory. Party management triumphed over the anti-war convictions of a majority within the Labour Party with the aid of our political antagonists.

The main division within the Party was between supporters of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown – primarily based on personalities rather than policies. Despite the tremendous wave of support for Blair which manifested itself in the 1997 General Election and the initial years of his government, the enthusiasm for New Labour gradually disintegrated, particularly after the Iraq War dragged on for years without any positive achievement.

When I was Labour MP for Harlow, we used to have 80 delegates at our General Management Committee meetings and up to 120 at the AGM. At

the present time, we get 20 to 30, who are not delegates but any members willing to attend. This is typical. Party membership collapsed under Tony Blair and those who left included former MPs, MEPs, councillors and other key party members. Today, ward Labour Parties are largely defunct and many Constituency Labour Parties barely exist. Local trade union support has also slumped.

Lewis Minkin's hefty tome, running to 800 pages, is infinitely painstaking in rooting out the details of Party management under New Labour. It is not an edifying story, but every aspect is fully covered. The Labour Party lost the trust and respect not only of many dedicated workers, but also of a huge proportion of the Labour electorate. Whether this can be restored, now that a decision to move away from Blairite managerial politics has been taken, remains to be seen. *The Blair Supremacy* should be an object lesson in what Labour must never allow to be repeated.

*Stan Newens*

## Darfur in crisis

**Mukesh Kapila and Damien Lewis, *Against a Tide of Evil: How one man became the whistleblower to the first mass murder of the Twenty-First Century*, Mainstream Publishing, 2013, 280 pages, hardback ISBN 9781780576329, £14.99**

In 2003, Mukesh Kapila was appointed head of the United Nations in Sudan, a country divided into two parts, North and South, due to decades of ethnic tension between the black Christian African community and the 'Arabic' Muslim North. Kapila's main purpose in Sudan was to negotiate a peace deal between the two separated states. However, upon his arrival, Kapila soon realised there is more work to be done when he is faced with constant monitoring in his new position by the *Mukhabarat* (the Sudanese intelligence agency), as well as corrupt dealings within the UN. His personal account of the events that followed reads almost like a mystery/thriller novel, as his actions put him at risk of being bugged, followed, and/or assassinated, with more than one attempt on his life.

Barely a week into his post, Kapila began to receive reports of suspicious 'Arab horsemen' violently targeting Darfuri civilians and destroying their villages. After hearing personal testimony from a woman in Nyala, she suddenly 'disappears'; more testimonies from people living in an internally displaced persons camp are desperately told with

dangerous consequences. Kapila's suspicions of state-sponsored ethnic cleansing are confirmed after a meeting with Omar Al-Arabi, the senior advisor within the president's office, as Omar coolly tells him of a 'final solution in Darfur'.

What is so unique about Kapila's account is how his personal experiences of genocide effect his decisions and encourage him to keep fighting for the Sudanese people, despite the dangers of speaking the truth. He writes:

'The horrific reality of those words – "the final solution" – is hard-wired into my soul, for my family is also one of genocide survivors.'

Learning about Kapila's values and beliefs helps the reader to understand his rebellious (to the UN at least) way of thinking and his need to bring justice to the victims of genocide. Furthermore, the lessons learned from his earlier life experiences, juxtaposed with the situations he faces in his role at the UN, makes the reader feel connected to him. There is an endearing story about how Mukesh faced up to his bullies in the English boarding school he attended age 17, by challenging one of them to a cross-country race. His courageous response to bullies and racists at such a young age is echoed when he is faced with *genocidaires* in his UN post decades later.

Kapila decided that his only option to prevent the ongoing violence in Darfur was to travel to countries around the world to raise money for his 'Greater Darfur Special Initiative' (which will accelerate humanitarian relief provision into Darfur), and to inform key players that there will be no peace in Sudan until the violence in Darfur has been put to a stop. Although he managed to raise several million dollars towards the target of \$22.8 million, the lack of action from governments world-wide and UN agencies was shameful. After Mukesh visited the UN in New York and also travelled to London, it is clear that the UN was fully aware of the violence in Darfur and had access to highly detailed reports but had no intention of intervening. Mukesh was told by his superiors that his job was to provide humanitarian aid where needed, not to get involved in politics.

'All it takes for evil to triumph is for a few good men to do nothing' wrote Edmund Burke in a quote at the start of chapter six. As an activist, it is highly frustrating to see that, even when world-wide UN agencies and governments are aware of the extent of violence, they are still not willing to help. Mukesh and a few members of his team are beacons of hope for the Sudanese people, inspiring the reader not to be one of the good people who let evil triumph.

When Kapila received no support from Western governments, he was determined to act alone notwithstanding the consequences. By constantly informing diplomats and other countries of the risks of inaction, he reminded them that this was their personal responsibility, too. Furthermore, he needed concrete evidence of ethnic cleansing and sent a team of aid workers into Darfur. While he succeeded in collecting proof of state-sponsored violence, rape and destruction, Kapila received no response from Western governments and was forced to evacuate UN staff from the capital of Darfur in Winter 2003, as he had received reports that they could be in mortal danger. In just eight weeks, after UN staff were allowed back into Darfur, a mass campaign of terror and ethnic cleansing was executed over an area the size of France. From then on, a whirlwind of emotions – mostly anger and disgust at what has happened – drove Kapila not to stop until justice has been served.

Although it is disheartening to watch governments and UN agencies do nothing in the face of mass atrocity, the media provide a powerful tool to encourage people to act to prevent genocide. Kapila became a whistleblower to the first mass murder of the twenty-first century; a mass murder he calls ‘the most successful genocide’. Over a year after the media storm erupted, peacekeepers were sent into Darfur, those responsible for the mass murders were referred to the International Criminal Court, and there was a UN Security Council resolution on Darfur. However, in 2012, Kapila received a personal plea from a woman in Sudan who assured him that nothing had been done either by the International Criminal Court or by the UN. He was thus driven to seek justice by collecting evidence in Sudan and informing world media, again, that world governments had failed to act. We all have a personal responsibility to act and prevent genocide. Although it is a long way to justice, we must not give up the fight for the Sudanese people.

*Jessica Benham*

*National Campaign Co-ordinator for Aegis Students*

*This title is available from [www.aegistrust.org](http://www.aegistrust.org)*

## Talking Law

**Carolyn Steedman, *An Everyday Life of the English Working Class*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, 310 pages, paperback ISBN 9781107670297, £19.99**

On occasion, you come to a book believing you already know the subject



matter but seeking additional details to supplement your knowledge. In this instance, I felt I might be partially there, being working class, but also as I had recently written an historical introduction to these times in my book *Safe at Work?*, in which I discussed the seminal case of Priestley versus Fowler. This was, I believe, the first ever case of a working class lad challenging, by means of the law, his right to a safe working environment by proposing the first ever ‘duty of care’ argument. Despite my research, I had been unable to identify just where a fifteen-year-old butcher’s mate could gain the insights and knowledge to be confident enough to mount such a legal challenge. So I was more than a little pleased when Carolyn Steedman published *An Everyday Life of the English Working Class* and I was able to get an even deeper foothold on precisely what my forebears did to secure remedy for their issues.

All of my questions and doubts about young Priestley were indirectly dealt with in the chapter entitled ‘Talking Law’. It is a well-informed, amusing and poignant account of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century working people. As with today’s working classes, there are some preconceived notions which are more misconceived than anything. Today, factory workers have to be alive to, and deal with, IT controlled machinery, and office workers have to deal with ever more complex computer systems, printers, photocopiers, and scanners. So for our working class predecessors, they may not have had the same technology but they certainly had the same concerns. Steedman provides a copy of an early legal document and, regardless of the lack of educational facilities, she clearly shows that working people were reading and writing. There were also very lively and robust social interactions of all types. But ‘talking law’, she says, was widespread and commonplace:

‘They took the disputes and antagonisms of everyday life to the magistrate, and talked law to him. This law talk was not so much the genteel exchange evoked by “conversations in the law” as a noisy, clamorous and often verbally violent making of a “conversible world”.’

So here was what had been white noise that I could not decipher and therefore had failed to get to grips with. Now I knew how Priestley had been able to protect himself by the law, as it was clearly explained. The words were clear, and the images left in your mind stood out in technicolour.

*An Everyday Life of the English Working Class* is essentially a book about a Nottinghamshire stocking maker, Joseph Woolley, a man prone to amuse himself by writing a diary, and Sir Gervase Clifton, the local

magistrate. There are explanations of how the two men's lives intersected and how their worlds, albeit different, were still impacted by the same issues; one dealing with the issues in a detached and amused manner in his diaries and the other, occasionally, in the court.

There are high jinks aplenty in the chapter 'Sex and the single man', some of which are uproarious, some appalling, but captured in such a manner that you can almost smell and taste the events!

There is detailed insight into Luddism. Woolley was a stocking maker and therefore his 'frames' would have been possible targets of those men and women protesting about the failing business opportunities afforded them as a result of poorer quality product entering the market and diminishing the means for them to earn a decent living. Not here the tired old presumptions that this working class dispute was backward looking and the destruction of machinery was a consequence of that view. There is a much more honest appraisal of the motivations of these working people and how hard they had to fight. Seven years is a long time to run any campaign, and the potential consequences for those arrested and accused seem wholly inappropriate.

Steedman has written a fascinating insight into the life of one working class diarist who is equally as interesting as a much more famous one from nearly two centuries earlier. The reader will be struck by some exposés that cause absolute horror, while others make you howl with laughter. But overall what you will 'see' is that people are people and that the differences are only in the fashion and technology they have to hand. These working class people worked effectively with their cutting edge technology, and had similar trade disputes to those of today. The conduct of both should be accepted within the context of the times, as elegantly laid out by Professor Steedman in her highly recommended book.

*Dave Putson*

## **The stone steppe**

**Vasily Grossman, *An Armenian Sketchbook: With an Introduction and Appendices by Robert Chandler and Yury Bit-Yunan*, translated from the Russian by Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, Maclehorse Press, Quercus, London, 222 pages, hardback ISBN 9780857052353, £12**

Vasily Grossman is a writer of classical Russian greatness, waltzing with the likes of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov. And this great modern, classical writer, who stayed and died (in 1964, from stomach

cancer) a Soviet writer in Moscow, aged 59, visited Soviet Armenia two years before his death, and to our (Armenians') great good fortune wrote this masterly book, the original title of which is an untranslatable Armenian greeting, *Barev Dzez* – *barev* in Armenian is a complex of multiple meanings; superficially it means 'hello', but etymologically it means 'Let there be good', hence 'God's (understood) Blessings unto you'.

It is a measure of Grossman's own much-tortured humanity (he was a war correspondent for the Soviet *Red Star*, covering the most terrifying battles of Moscow, Kursk, Stalingrad, and Berlin) that he could write the most beautiful ending of any book I have yet encountered, and here it is in full;

'Though mountains be reduced to mere skeletons, may mankind endure forever.

Accept these lines from a translator from Armenian who knows no Armenian. Probably I have said much that is clumsy and wrong. But all I have said, clumsy or not, I have said with love.

**Barev dzez – all good to you, Armenians and non-Armenians!'**

Moving backwards and up, note the sweet self-deprecation in the paragraph above, which defines the risible predicament of the Soviet bureaucratic literary foolishness, of getting 'their selected intellectuals' to translate from languages they did not know. It also displays Grossman's stand-up comic's genius for throwing one-liner daggers at his favourite targets.

The first part of the sentence (mountains reduced to skeletons) refers also to one of the grand themes of Grossman's book – manifesting Armenia as the country of rocks, stones, broken mountains, the most ancient, actually, the oldest volcanic piece of earth on this planet.

Grossman, amazingly, alone in the world of international *belles-lettres*, has picked up on this Soviet Armenian intellectual mantra, and has produced one of the most beautiful chapters (Ch.10) ever written anywhere – the book is worth its weight in gold for this chapter alone;

'What expresses the soul of Armenia is stone. I have never seen so much stone scattered about the ground – and I have seen the Urals, the cliffs of the Caucasus, and the Tien Shan. What strikes you in Armenia is not the stone of gorges, steep mountainsides, or snow-capped peaks. Far more striking is the stone that lies flat on the ground: the stone meadows and fields, the stone steppe.'

And here comes Grossman's most potent meditative insight that unwittingly defines the territory of Armenia as the earliest piece of volcanic land on the waters of this planet, and its people as the first

hominids (I call *humanoids*) of the world, making their stone axes, collapsing mountains, creating language and culture;

‘It is as if countless stonecutters have been at work – thousands, tens of thousands, millions of stonecutters, working day and night, for years on end, for centuries, for millennia. [...] From what they left behind in this vast quarry you could make a mountain so high that the snow on its peaks would never melt. There is still enough stone to build any number of towers of Babel, from the one swallowed up by the sands three thousand years ago to the skyscrapers that buzz with activity on the far side of the Atlantic. [...] I began to think of this small nation as a giant nation. Only a giant has the strength to turn stone into mounds of juicy vegetables and the very sweetest of grapes ... only titanic labour can have extracted grape juice from basalt.’

The immediate reason for Grossman’s motivation of writing his ‘Armenian’ masterpiece was a well-paid commission to ‘translate’ the multi-volume novel of the Armenian Tolstoy, Hratchia Kotchar, who had imitated Tolstoy’s Napoleonic *War and Peace* to re-invent it, conceptualising the noble contribution of the Soviet Armenians to the defeat of Nazism.

The puzzle, thus, of Vasily Grossman’s decision to sojourn in Armenia had a precise cause, a wish for spiritual cleansing and intellectual renewal, not the advertised nonsense of wishing to have a holiday or get some money together. Grossman went to Soviet Armenia there to find ... himself, encounter his own soul, to discover and define his own intellectual creative identity.

‘With penetrating insight and an all pervading excitement, you absorb a huge universe – houses, trees, faces of passers-by, signs, squares, smells, dust, cats and dogs, the colour of the sky. During these minutes, like an omnipotent God, you bring a new world into being, you create, you build inside yourself a whole city with all its streets and squares, with its courtyards and patios, with its sparrows, with its thousands of years of history ...’

Where Grossman becomes totally outrageous is when he denigrates his fellow writer Hratchia Kotchar’s life-work. Inexplicably, Grossman disguises him as ‘Martirosyan’, and refers to his ‘*novel about a copper works*’ (Ch. 6), which it absolutely is not. I can’t accept it even as a piece of black humour. Kotchar’s massive novel (even longer than Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*) is about the Second World War (not ‘copper works’) titled *Meds Dan Zavagnere(h)* (*The Children of the Great Household* – translated erroneously as *The Children of the Large House*).

And Grossman reduces this to ‘cobalt works’! It is very clear to me that

Grossman is a slave of the green-eyed monster ... suffers mortally from uncontrollable jealousy, trying to steal Kotchar's crown of being the Soviet Tolstoy – Kotchar was already well-established throughout the Soviet Union, already in receipt of critical 'Tolstoyan' accolades to which Grossman himself was desperately aspiring.

Grossman is unfair to Kotchar. I have no doubt, on the other hand, that Kotchar (I knew him well – he was a family friend of ours) would have done absolutely anything and everything to have rendered Grossman's life in Armenia a happy one.

And when I discovered in the scholarly notes by Yuri Bit Yunan that Grossman had lied even about his own flesh-and-blood, fantasising horrendous things about his own family ... I thought Grossman had gone mad – but then I felt sad and sorry for him – especially in view of a lifetime witnessing the unimaginable horrors of the Second World War. The wonder is that Grossman could keep himself as sane as he was, having survived the street battles of Stalingrad.

I think he can and must be forgiven, because in spite of it all, Grossman's *An Armenian Sketchbook* is such a unique masterpiece, a subtle amalgam of good and evil on a biblical scale, precisely like the Old Testament.

*Hovhanness I. Pilikian*

## The Great War: Before and After

**Charles Emmerson, *1913: The World before the Great War*, Vintage Books, 2013, 528 pages, paperback ISBN 9780099575788, £9.99**

**Peter Fritzsche, *De Alemanes A Nazis, 1914-1933 (From Germans to Nazis, 1914-1933)*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Argentina, 2009, 258 pages, paperback ISBN 9789871220434**

Two extremely interesting books. As we all know, 2014 is the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. It is time for a new take on the subject following controversies about the 'culprits'.

AJP Taylor famously said in one of his television appearances that you can trace the origins of World War One as far back as you want, but Fritzsche's book has a very different outlook on the First *and* Second World Wars. The second began in 1914 with German/Prussian imperial ambition, which did not decrease, despite or because of defeat in 1918. Who is to 'blame' in all this apart from nationalism itself, of which many

countries and war protagonists are guilty? Maybe the blame apportioned now is not the issue. The basic question is who makes war? With 100 million killed violently in the twentieth century and, pro rata, more in the twenty-first so far, the issue is more widespread than just ‘culprits’.

The book *1913* reveals how a ‘world’ war was far from the minds of pre-war societies caught up in a mix of music, literature, and culture generally, the unity and support of British, German and Russian royal houses, and industrial development and exhibitions (the *Exposition Universelle et Internationale* at Ghent (Belgium) in 1913). One photo description suggests that the exhibition served as a celebration of human progress and a statement of the primacy of European civilisation, which others wanted to emulate. Less than eighteen months later, Ghent was occupied by the German army (p.xvi).

*1913* describes 23 cities in 19 countries. London is at the centre of things in trade and finance, with New York in particular catching up fast. London played a crucial part in international economics – gold was the means of facilitating trade and payments, balancing trade with gold, in turn affecting interest rates and ‘equalising economic development’ (Winston Churchill). The *nemesis* was going to hit them in the inter-war years, along with other political and economic developments.

I found that the best chapter was ‘Vienna’, which gives clues about the divided and potentially explosive disputes between nationalities. It identifies and reveals the antics in central Europe. How about the Austro-Hungarian Empire with six different ethnic groups, most claiming to be separate, and jealous of others?

New York and Washington provided havens for Jews in general, and Russian Jews in particular, a melting pot for many ancient feuds and vendettas of old Europe. In the twentieth century, new hegemony emerges. New York, the capital of modernism (p.165), skyscrapers and ‘campanile’ architecture based on Venice, the Woolworth building modelled on the London Houses of Parliament with the floor copied from a Greek island, plus collective works of art from Europe, began to exert the international flavour of pre-World War One (p.168).

But who was going to control the Slavs, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Poles, Romanians, and Ukrainians; Germany with its quest for recognition of its greatness; and Italy with its search for a North African Empire to restore the glory that was Rome? ‘Nothing seems to change’ I think is the message we can take. The ‘League of Nations’ after World War One was a failure. It is reminiscent of the ‘United Nation’s (so-called), set up following World War Two (see *We Did Nothing: Why the truth doesn’t always come out when the UN goes in*, by Linda Polman, Penguin, 2004).

How did some Germans, with the development of Berlin as an industrial capital (Chapter 3), the envy of many, turn into *Kristalnacht*, window-smashing anti-Semitic fanatics? There are writings about the punitive reparations imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty, rampant inflation (I read one story of a hand basket left outside a shop, full of worthless Deutschmarks, while the shopper bought some apples. The basket was nicked and the money dumped on the pavement!)

Fritzsche dismisses all this. Misfortune did not create Nazism. Not Hitler's hostility towards the Jews. Not the hatred and fear with the hope of optimism. It was the sentiments which the Nazis called on in an original and effective manner, affirming patriotism and sacrifice incurred in World War One, reinforced by 1918, when the Weimar Republic succeeded the Empire of the Kaiser. This process was concluded in 1933 with the reformulation of the promises of 1914. The Nazis were very popular in Germany (and elsewhere, where the reformulation was transformed into an alternative politics).

*1913* describes the spread of optimism and burgeoning grandeur from Winnipeg to Melbourne, New York to Saint Petersburg, Tokyo to Bombay, Buenos Aires to Jerusalem, Constantinople to Tehran, with little Europe, the 'cause' of all the trouble, stuck in the middle. Yet there were already tensions before World War One. One Australian commentator viewed Australia as a thing apart and 'yet part of a glorious and indivisible whole' (p.237). Little did he know what the twentieth century had in store. Emmerson's book shows how trouble was brewing before 1913 with wars already taking place in many places and cities of the world. The 'March of Progress' and imperialism decimating indigenous populations were leading to a wholesale explosive situation.

'The assumption which underlines such phrases as the "Expansion of England" or "Greater Britain", and suggests the familiar principle of federation as the logical form of closer union is not justified by the tendency either of instinctive sentiment or actual developments in Canada or Australia. So far as generalisation is possible, it may be said that there is not, in fact, any growing consciousness of a common nationality, but exactly the reverse. In other words, the basis of imperial federation, instead of expanding and solidifying, is melting away.' (pp.433-3)

Now a judgement after the War.

'For if the Great War had shown one thing, was it not that European civilisation, once hailed as the most progressive and most advanced in the world, was really nothing more than a thin veneer for barbarism? Chinese

intellectual Yan Fu noted that “the European race’s last three hundred years of evolutionary progress have all come down to nothing but four words: selfishness, slaughter, shamelessness and corruption”.’

*Richard Minns*

## **Socialist Feminist**

**Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: A Life*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, 528 pages, hardback ISBN 9780747583844, £25**

Rachel Holmes is the author of several biographies and jointly with Susie Orbach of *Fifty shades of Feminism*. She has taken on a major task in following after the magisterial two-volume biography of Eleanor Marx, published some fifty years ago by Yvonne Kapp. I have a particular interest in Eleanor Marx and Yvonne Kapp’s book. My wife, Eleanor Singer, was named by her suffragette mother after her famous namesake, and Yvonne Kapp was for some years a very close friend of Eleanor Singer’s. I have been re-reading the book Yvonne wrote all those years ago. But there are other important coincidences: Eleanor Singer, like Eleanor Marx, was Jewish, both grand-daughters of learned rabbis, and both rejected Zionism; both were strikingly beautiful and highly intelligent; both were politically active in Socialist Feminism, not just socialism and feminism, but Socialist Feminism. Both lived in Hampstead and had devoted fathers. Both were heavy smokers, until Eleanor Singer discovered from Richard Doll the dangers of lung cancer. But there the similarities end and the differences begin. There is first the difference in their birth dates – separated by nearly fifty years, years of great social change, with even more change to follow, in two world wars, before Eleanor Singer’s death in 1998, just 100 years after Eleanor Marx died.

The difference in the time of their lives is only one difference. Eleanor Singer was extremely well educated – at boarding schools and university. Eleanor Marx had no formal education, but learnt from her father and his close friend and comrade, Frederick Engels, and taught herself languages. The Marx family was always in debt, rescued only by Engels from his business earnings, and Eleanor Marx’s work was always ill paid and most of the money was purloined by Edward Aveling. Eleanor Singer, by contrast, inherited a third of the wealth, which David, her father, made as a stockbroker, and her work as a doctor was well paid. This emphasizes the difference between Eleanor Marx’s training, such as it was, as a teacher



and actress, and Eleanor Singer's training in science and medicine. Another difference lay in Eleanor Marx's abhorrence and rejection of all domestic duties, except when she briefly stayed in Stratford and gardened, while Eleanor Singer was a brilliant cook, highly skilled seamstress, and famous in Chesterfield, even in her 70s, as the 'running shopper', running from shop to shop to make her purchases.

One of the big differences lay in their marriages – Eleanor Marx's failed relationship with Lissagaray and disastrous marriage to Edward Aveling and lack of children, compared with Eleanor Singer's happy marriage to Sydney Fink and, after he was killed in an air-raid, more than fifty years of great happiness with me and our two beautiful children, adopted from birth for our great comfort and joy. The greatest difference between the two Eleanors lies, however, in the years in which they lived. Separated only by some fifty years, the years in which Eleanor Singer grew up, after the First World War, was an utterly different world from that of the 1880s and 90s, when Eleanor Marx was most active.

The result of this difference of the ages is that, while Eleanor Singer inherited a world in which socialism was already being established in the Soviet Union and women had won the right to vote in Britain, Eleanor Marx was a true pioneer of Feminist Socialism, and as such one of the great figures of the Nineteenth Century. Rachel Holmes repeatedly draws our attention to the innovative and path-breaking work of Eleanor Marx in her leadership of the Socialist League and in her publication of *The Woman Question*, encouraged by Engels, who then wrote *The Origin of the Family*, combining the thought of Darwin, Bebel and Lewis Henry Morgan, and drawing his strength from the two working class Burns sisters, Mary and Lizzie, whom he loved. But, Eleanor Marx was something more than a great political writer. As Marx's secretary and interpreter, her influence was widespread. In 1885/6 alone, as Rachel Holmes records it,

'She made the first English translation of Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, revised a new edition of Lissagaray's *History of the Paris Commune*, put on the first performance of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in England, championed the programming of art and education in the Socialist League, produced a body of journalistic work on prostitution and slavery, became a ghost writer and, finally, completed the English translation of the first volume of Marx's *Capital* with Samuel Moore, Engels, Aveling, Lafargue and Longuet.'

No mean feat!

The last fifteen years of Eleanor Marx's life were so full, that it is hard to believe that one little lady – and she was petite – 'tussy', as she was

always called by her family and friends – ‘tussy’, pronounced like ‘pussy’, and not ‘fussy’ – could have accomplished so much. Yvonne Kapp called 1884-1898 ‘The Crowded Years’, and they were. Eleanor Marx played a leading role in every feminist and socialist movement of that period. But they also ended very sadly. First, in 1886, came the visit to America, at the invitation of the ‘Socialist Labour Party’. Eleanor saw that it needed to be internationalised from its German roots and linked to the trade unions and associated with a movement of women, who, she found, were most heavily exploited, and against enduring child labour. Aveling spent their money outrageously and purloined funds that were not theirs.

Back in England, Eleanor’s ‘den’ became a ‘literary factory’ with articles and notices for the Social Democrats’ tour of the UK in 1887, and her active defence of Home Rule for Ireland. In her direct defence of the ‘Open Society’ against the anarchists, she won the acclaim of her mother as the true ‘real politiker’. She started a weekly column in *Justice* and established a strong friendship with Bernard Shaw, who called her ‘so youthful and strenuous’, and added Sylvia Pankhurst to her friendly circle.

Then, in 1896, everything changed. Engels became seriously ill and died. Eleanor lost her ‘uncle’, great supporter, collaborator and friend, but gained a legacy, which made her independent, though Aveling pinched much of it. Eleanor could henceforth afford to employ a housekeeper and a secretary.

Engels’ death brought most disturbing news for Eleanor. Engels had confessed to a friend that Freddy Demuth was not his son, but Karl Marx’s, and the Freibergers living with Eleanor knew this and would use the knowledge to their advantage. Eleanor was thunderstruck and sought to question Engels, but he was dead. Recovering from this shocking news about her beloved father was hard, but the news brought Eleanor and Freddy, now her brother, closer together for the rest of their lives. There was still much work to do for Eleanor with her new secretary – 41 lectures in one year, including a critique of imperialism in Africa and India, and new work for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. This was in addition to her work for the gas workers, who called her ‘our mother, the stoker’, when electricity was not yet universal, and gas was the main source of heat and light.

The end came when Aveling walked out on Eleanor, taking valuables and finance to marry another woman assuming a new name. All Eleanor’s friends and family had long warned her about Aveling, but she had stubbornly retained her loyalty to him. Now she was desperate, and persuaded a doctor friend to obtain Prussic Acid for her, took it and died.

She had tried to commit suicide before, but had been rescued by Olive Schreiner, who made her vomit. This time, Olive was in South Africa. Eleanor's secretary and housekeeper were out, and Aveling left her to it, pretending afterwards that he had not been there. Aveling took Eleanor's dowry from Engels, but all Marx's papers and Eleanor's with them were in the secure possession of Laura as Marx's daughter, who guarded them for the rest of her long life. The news of Eleanor's death was greeted with dismay, and thousands of messages of condolence were received from organisations in Britain and Ireland and all over the world. She was buried in the Waterloo crematorium, but her remains were later removed to rest with her father and mother in Highgate Cemetery.

Rachel Holmes has done an important job in reviving interest in Eleanor Marx, sixty years after Yvonne Kapp's great work. Reducing a two volume work of 1,200 pages to just over 500 pages from the same original material was a major task, and re-establishing Eleanor Marx as one of the greatest pioneers of Socialist Feminism is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of our society today.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## **Gated Road to Nowhere**

**Simon Winlow and Steve Hall, *Rethinking Social Exclusion: the end of the social?*, Sage, 2013, 216 pages, paperback ISBN 9781849201087, £25.99**

Neo-liberalism pervades our lives in the West, as Simon Winlow and Steve Hall graphically demonstrate in this book about contemporary social exclusion. Concentrating on Britain and, to a lesser degree, the US, they claim 'the end of history' as Francis Fukuyama first argued in 1993, but there the similarity ends. For Fukuyama, liberal capitalism was '*the pinnacle of our historic political and sociocultural evolution*', but for Winlow and Hall it has created '*the death of the social [and] we remain mired in a deeply cynical, apolitical and thoroughly consumerised social and cultural space*'.

Both these writers are senior academics. They co-direct the Centre for Realist Criminology at Teeside University, UK, set up to undertake criminological research and present it in all its '*realist actuality*'. Both have international reputations for work on consumer culture and developing new perspectives in criminological theory.

They take as their starting point the commonsense view of social exclusion in which it is believed that in the West some of the population live outside the mainstream of their societies because of lack of paid work and the way of life they follow as a consequence. But theirs is not another dry academic debate about who is or who is not living in this way, with policy proposals to achieve apparent improvements in the lives of those affected. Their objective is to turn the idea on its head. Their main argument is that, in many respects, the most important feature in relation to social exclusion is to recognise that liberal capitalism has brought us to the point where *all* of us are excluded from '*the social*' in important ways. The socially excluded are very much like everyone else (apart from their lack of money and consumer spending power). A wide range of research, theory and, at times, blunt commentary is deployed to develop this perspective.

The book is divided into distinct but linked parts. The first chapter sets the scene of the 2008 global financial crash and its repercussions, especially in relation to the role of a semi-permanent, socially excluded class in Western liberal democracies. Chapter 2 outlines the European theoretical tradition of social exclusion, while Chapter 3 focuses on the American underclass debate. The next two chapters introduce ideas that underpin the rest of the book. Chapter 4 '*repositions*' social exclusion and looks at the way in which consumer capitalism has developed despite the 2008 financial crash. Winlow and Hall use the work of psycho-analyst Jacques Lacan to point out that although we still are expected to '*invest harshly in the symbolism of consumer experiences and strive to attain them*' we are '*forever incapable of fully realising the condition of ultimate pleasure for which we are taught to yearn*'. Lacan believed that the reason for this is that we are encouraged to form relationships with other *objects* rather than other subjects. For Lacan, this is as much a problem for the wealthy as for the poor. Consequently, Winlow and Hall argue that the problem of social exclusion needs to be '*re-positioned*' away from policy proposals designed to improve the lot of the poor (which by themselves will be ineffective), to focus instead on the capitalist system in its uncontrollable and nasty entirety.

In Chapter 5, *Politics at the end of history*, the authors begin to explore the impact of neo-liberalist and post-modern ideas on society. At the heart of neo-liberalism is the idea of the rational and calculating individual, able to strip away the apparent falsehoods offered by the ideologies and belief systems surrounding us. Individuals are supposed to be able to determine their best advantage in the never-ending competition for status

underpinning consumerism. Yet despite the stress and shallowness of consumerism, they are completely unable to question, reconsider or construct alternative ways of living or, in the authors' view, undertake the necessary hard political action to change society. Postmodernism has created a situation where we are stuck at '*the end of history*' with no convincing, all-embracing ideology which might provide a path out of consumerism and individualism. Winlow and Hall are dismissive of formal political activity in the various institutions of what they term '*parliamentary capitalism*'. Working class solidarity and its achievements in the late twentieth century are also regrettably cast in the past. Only current trade union campaigning against various austerity measures is identified positively, but this is scarcely endorsed. Unions' motivation, according to the authors, is the fear of their members' falling into the abyss of the social excluded rather than any progressive collective impetus to help those at the bottom as well as the so-called squeezed middle.

So what hope is there of progressive change? There are several ways in which Winlow and Hall consider this. The first is to examine the prospects for the socially excluded. Are they now, in traditional Marxist terms, a reserve army of labour or are they simply '*flawed consumers*', as Zygmunt Bauman argued?

The poorest undertake the most menial, badly paid and soul-destroying jobs, often with minimal job security – so-called 'McJobs'. They have been considered to be a reserve of flexible and disposable labour-power for capitalist enterprises, used only in times of economic growth. More powerfully, they act to '*systematise insecurity*'. Is the idea of a reserve army of labour still a useful one? Winlow and Hall argue that it is not. Western capitalism is no longer bounded by national boundaries. Globally organised capitalism does not need reserve armies of labour based in advanced Western democracies. They can simply move East to Bangladesh, China and India if they want to expand, using cheaper, more easily disposable labour.

In neo-liberal societies, consumer goods and lifestyles function as a means of constructing social identity rather than productive work. The poor are redundant economically but they are also excluded because they are flawed consumers, unable to spend and display in the manner expected by the majority. Does their position lead them to question the values and spending habits intrinsic to consumer society? Winlow and Hall use their own research to show that if the poor swapped places with the rich tomorrow, nothing would change. The socially excluded poor are as imbued with consumerist values as anyone else. They may be flawed but

they are definitely not revolutionary. They are not waiting in the wings to transform society, as some argued following the 2011 riots. In fact, the authors claim that they have another role entirely. They act as a '*reserve army of consumers*'. The socially excluded as flawed consumers are used by active consumers with spending power as a negative comparator against which they can view themselves positively. This is simply status differentiation of the worst kind.

In Chapter 8, *Occupying non-places*, the gated community and the shopping mall are used as two examples to describe the way in which many with money have retreated from '*the social*' almost entirely. Winlow and Hall describe '*the social*' as '*a network of figurations and obligations that bond people together, a source of systematised meaning that creates truths and compels us to accept its structuring logic*'. Both are described as '*non-places*' where individual self-interest has predominated and accelerated the disintegration of any idea of the community or '*the social*'. Relationships between neighbours in gated communities are purely instrumental. There is no sense in which they may be described as communities. Shopping malls are socially sterile places, simply devoted to displaying and buying goods and services. Public space has been transformed almost entirely into commercial space. There may be no *public* seats to sit and rest but there will be *commercial* seating for a meal or a drink in what may be called the food and drink factories of multiple outlets (Mexican, Chinese, American, British, French ...) or the multi-national chains (McDonalds, KFC, Pizza Hut ...) found there now. Even that may have changed since this book was published. It is now likely that commercial seating will be controlled (no saving a seat for a friend here!) and timed (a maximum of 20 minutes!) Shopping malls, like gated communities, may claim to be safe but they are definitely not social!

With liberal capitalism so intrusive, and apparently unstoppable in its ability to hijack and transform social life into commercial opportunity, what hope is there for the future? Not much, according to these authors, unless we can find new ways to think about social, political and economic change.

They sum up their arguments in the last two chapters, drawing heavily on the psychoanalytical work of Slavoj Žižek. This is difficult to follow and is the most unsatisfactory part of the book. It is worth noting that these authors have been haughtily critical or caustically sarcastic about what they call '*liberal left*' politics in various chapters, but the label is meaningless, covering a lot of variation in Labour, socialist and communist politics at a national and local level, historically and currently.

Their lack of distinction between these makes it impossible for them to offer any more than a simplistic way forward. They simply jump from psychoanalysis to political action. For those who are socially excluded, they urge that rather than *'battling for "re-inclusion" ... it might be more fruitful for the poor to move forward together as a class, and to see their troubles as equivalent to those of their neighbours. They may then be in a position not to think but to know that a more just world is possible if resolute action is taken and personal sacrifices are made.'*

What personal sacrifices did they have in mind for the poor to look forward to? They talk about the need for a new economic and social order but can only offer a continuation of discussions initiated by *'some of today's more imaginative political economists'*. An alternative approach might have been grounded in understanding how political action changes thinking: stretching from challenging multi-nationals to saving the local library. But that will have to wait for another book.

Cathy Davis

## Spanish reckoning

**Peter Day, *Franco's Friends – How British Intelligence helped bring Franco to power in Spain*, Biteback Publishing, 2012, 244 pages, paperback ISBN 9781849543613, £9.99**

If you like Capt. W. E. Johns ('Biggles'), Le Carré, Len Deighton, John Buchan with Ian Fleming (who makes several appearances in the book), Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford thrown in, you will enjoy this book. The endless wheeling and dealing, intriguing and double-crossing were a bit too much, but *Franco's Friends* remains a very interesting read. (An interest in the Spanish Civil War helps.)

The flight from Croydon, in July 1936, to pick up Franco from the Canary Islands and fly him to Morocco, from where, with Generals Sanjurjo and Mola, he launched the rebellion against the Spanish Republic, which quickly turned into the Spanish Civil War, is usually only a footnote in most histories. Here it is described in detail.

The book's title, *Franco's Friends – How British Intelligence helped bring Franco to power in Spain*, is something of a misnomer. It suggests that there were lots of fascists in high places in the British government that were Franco's friends. There is some truth in this, of course, but it is not the whole truth. There is no doubt that the British establishment had its

admirers of Mussolini and Hitler, including that loose cannon, King Edward VIII, AKA the Duke of Windsor, but often such acceptance was purely pragmatic politics.

Many were rightly and righteously outraged by the farcical non-intervention treaty once the Spanish Civil War got going. While the Italian fascists and the Nazis sent huge supplies of troops and war *matériel* to Franco, Britain, France, et al. sat on their hands. This was because of British and French fears of the 'Red Menace'. The Russian Revolution of 1917 struck horror and fear into the hearts of the European elites, as had the French Revolution of 1789, long before. However, in the 1930s, there wasn't much 'Red Menace'. Indeed, Stalin had reservations about entering the Spanish Civil War. He wanted to keep on the right side of the British. He was much more worried about Nazi ambitions to the east.

The Nazis were not much interested in Britain, which was pretty much Aryan, after all, with a few coalmines and a huge empire that did not clash excessively with Nazi visions. They wanted the vast resources and lands to the east, whose inhabitants were Slavs and Jews, to be exterminated. The Russians eventually entered the Spanish Civil War on the republican side, and the 'Red Menace' actually became a threat because of the bungling, pusillanimity and appeasement of Britain and France. The Soviet Union gained a foothold in Western Europe. They supplied the republicans with arms, lifted all their gold reserves and, at the same time, undermined the republican cause. They were defeated; Franco was triumphant. 'The Red Menace' was held at bay and yet, within a year or two, the Soviet Union was allied to the West.

Now the problem was Franco's fascist Spain, supported by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, so the vital Straits of Gibraltar were under threat. And this is where the book gets really interesting. Hugh Dalton, a Labour man, minister in the Foreign Office, wanted to kick Franco when he was down and count him out. Franco had won the civil war but his position was precarious. There were plots to restore the monarchy (Alfonso XIII's wife, Ena, was born at Balmoral and her son, Don Juan, was the only child to escape the haemophilia gene inherited from Queen Victoria). The country was, in every sense of the word, a shambles: economically, physically and socially (half a million in prison and concentration camps). Franco was a puppet of the Nazis, said Hugh Dalton. Not so, according to this book. Certainly he was hardly neutral, which he was supposed to be, because he provided fuelling and other services to the German war machine and sent 'the Blue Division' to support the catastrophic German 'Operation Barbarossa' against Russia. On reflection, this might not have been so



much solidarity with the Nazis as to keep the Germans off Franco's back. The Nazis wanted to march through Spain to attack Gibraltar. There were plenty of Franco-fascists prepared to offer military assistance to the Germans. Franco was so desperate he sucked up to the British to get goods to keep him above water. Franco, it appears, was personally honest, but massive bribes were paid to keep the Spanish out of the war and not side with the Axis Powers. It worked. In the end it was not so much that Franco had fascist friends in high places in Britain, but that he desperately wanted to be bailed out and the British obliged to keep him out of the war.

Hitler and Franco met only once. Hitler said he would rather have a tooth pulled than meet the Generalissimo again. The Germans and Italians hoped to take advantage of Franco but, being the crafty old devil he was, he outfoxed and outlived them all. In the end, he had the British and Americans eating out of his hand, now a bulwark against the new Red Menace, and millions of tourists taking advantage of the stability of a 40-year-old reign of terror to sun and bronze themselves on Spain's beaches.

*Nigel Potter*

## New Happy Life

**Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, I. B. Tauris, 2014, 320 pages, paperback ISBN 9781780766959, £15.99**

*Land of Albania!*  
*Let me bend mine eyes*  
*On thee!*  
 Lord Byron

Vickers, with James Pettifer one of Britain's leading Albanologists, has written, or contributed to, fourteen books on Albania and Eastern Europe. This one is extended from its original 1995 publication to the 2013 Albanian election, thereby putting it ahead of Owen Pearson's (unmentioned) *Albania in the Twentieth Century* (3 volumes, 2006).

The Introduction adumbrates Albanian history from earliest times to the 1479 Ottoman conquest. Two formidable queens, Teuta (she gave the Romans a run for their money) and Olympias (mother of Alexander the Great), hailed as national heroines in the 1985 communist-produced *Fjalori Encyclopedik Shqiptar*, deserved a mention, as did Skanderbeg's celebration in Vivaldi's (lost) opera and Samuel Johnson's play *Irene*. My

own analysis of Byzantine Albanian sources (*Byzantion* 63, 1993, pp. 29-36) is ignored, likewise my other cognate articles and reviews. Never mind, Miranda, I forgive you.

The *Fjalori* was a valuable guide for Tirana-spotters: Who's In, Who's Out? Its encomium of Gjergj Fishta would have saved Vickers (p. 191) from asserting a ban on his poetry .

Chapters 2-6 continue the story down to 1939, encompassing Albanian independence and the reign of bandit-turned-King Ahmet Zog ('bird' in Albanian), a name recurrent throughout Orwell's *Coming Up For Air*. His son's (self-styled Leka I) 1990s comic opera attempts to regain the throne, and grandson Leka II's royal pretensions, receive due attention later on.

Vickers' workwoman-like style, mercifully free of academic jargon, disdains the light aside. Thus, her readers are deprived of the claim (denied by some, accepted by his biographers Clive Ellis and Iain Wilton) that cricketer-polymath C. B. Fry was offered the Albanian throne. Equally missing are Enver Hoxha's passion for Norman Wisdom films (interpreted – doubtless to the bemusement of a grateful Norman – as brave proletarian warrior in the class struggle), and Albania's converse attraction for the punk ditties of Attila the Stockbroker.

Likewise, had Vickers read the eight volumes of Hoxha's *Ditari* (Diary, 1955-1966, similarly absent from Jon Halliday's otherwise excellent anthology, *The Artful Albanian: The Memoirs of Enver Hoxha*, 1986), she could have included such titbits as Hoxha's (himself no mean trencher-man: on his first day in Paris – he taught French pre-war – he consumed eight croissants for breakfast) astonishment at the gluttony of Harry Pollitt at a Moscow conference.

Vickers frequently cites the Party newspaper *Zëri i Popullit* (Voice of The People), and a handful of other titles, hence presumably reads Albanian. Which makes the omission of (e.g.) most of Hoxha's multifarious writings, Aleks Buda's multi-volumed national history, the prison memoirs of Todi and Fatos Lubonja, the vast array of archival, magazine, and newspaper resources, and the YouTube cornucopia, ranging from clips of Enver orating or presiding over trials of 'traitors' to current leading politicians Berisha and Rama, quite surprising.

Vickers (p. 160, citing *The Titoites*) rightly calls Hoxha an 'entertaining' writer. He was by far the most readable and erudite of all the communist leaders, writing with great humour and panache on a huge variety of historical, literary, and political issues. Notable titles include *Notes on China*, *The Superpowers*, *Two Friendly Peoples* (Albania and Greece, where he discourses interestingly on Pre-Socratic philosophers), and

above all *With Stalin*, in which we have the surely unique spectacle of two dictators discussing Homeric philology – all rich veins untapped by Vickers.

Vickers has dropped a previous claim (with Pettifer) that Hoxha became senile, his later books ‘ghosted’. They produced no evidence, and Hoxha looked and sounded lucid enough in Albanian videos I’ve seen of his 1981 ‘election’ address (never tense affairs), receiving delegates in 1984, and signing documents with Alia. Or was this the mysterious dentist Peter Shpalli, ‘Enver’s Double’, generally dismissed as the figment of Lloyd Jones’ imagination in his *Biografi*?

I’ve seen two editions of *With Stalin*. The first contains effusive praise of Mehmet Shehu. In the second, he is airbrushed out, an ‘unperson’. Vickers deals too briefly with this greatest of all Albanian mysteries. Shehu, Hoxha’s fellow-partisan commander and long-time Prime Minister (plus other posts), was announced (18 December 1981) as having committed suicide ‘in a fit of nervous depression’. Rumours about foul play at once proliferated. The Western press carried tales of Hoxha shooting Shehu either at a dinner party or Central Committee meeting – I’ve heard the second version from a high-ranking Albanian refugee here in Calgary. Hoxha ridicules these ‘Wild West shoot-out scenarios’ in *The Titoites*, and Shehu’s son Bashkim has publicly affirmed suicide.

Years ago, I published a translation of an interview with Shehu’s chauffeur in an Italian Albanian-language newspaper implying that Hoxha and Ramiz Alia had orchestrated a nocturnal bedroom shooting by the *Sigurimi* (Secret Police). Several compelling motives persist. There were objections to a planned Shehu family marriage with ‘undesirable elements’. Hoxha and Shehu had often been at ideological loggerheads. His elimination would clear the way for Hoxha’s anointed successor, Alia. Historian Arben Puto had discovered and reported to Hoxha British Intelligence archives naming Shehu as pro-Western and potentially useful. Hence his depiction as a ‘polyagent’ in *The Titoites*, simultaneous spying for half a dozen countries – must have been hard to keep his head straight: if it’s Tuesday, I must be spying for America ...

Khrushchev categorised Hoxha and Shehu as ‘not only monsters but fiends’. Shehu most deserved these epithets, popularly nicknamed ‘The Butcher of Tirana’, notorious for his claim to have strangled Koçi Xoxhe (Hoxha’s post-war, pro-Yugoslavia rival, initially Stalin’s favourite), and his public threat of ‘a bullet in the brain’ for anyone defying the Party line.

Ismail Kadare fictionalised Shehu’s end in *The Successor*. I have published (on the ReadySteadyBook site, also the *TLS*) fully documented

exposures of his lying claims to dissent, but inevitably his fan club remain mired in mumpsimus. Vickers is sensibly not of this gang, and has little about Kadare, albeit letting him off lightly for his 1990 desertion to Paris, the real reason being that Enver's pet (Albanian newspapers have recently published fresh evidence) understood that the communist game was up.

Hoxha is generally branded a paranoid, if not extravagant – though living comfortably in 'The Leaders' Bloc' he did not have Ceaușescu's demented edifice complex – tyrant. No question that his frantic purges doomed thousands of former colleagues, intellectuals, and priests to labour camps or firing squads for imaginary crimes. Amnesty International once estimated a third of the population was incarcerated. The *Sigurimi* were more relentless than Ceaușescu's *Securitate*. Particularly odious was the use of child informants on parents, not the only Albanian echo of 1984, whose 'New Happy Life' slogan was also Hoxha's. However, the much-ridiculed concrete bunkers ('pill-boxes') and sharpened vine-stakes were not a madman's nonsense. Given the attempted Anglo-American razzia (betrayed by Philby), and the ever-present possibility of Soviet invasion after Tirana's rupture from Moscow, plus 1956 and 1968, Hoxha's fears were justified.

Vickers provides well-balanced accounts of the war years and aftermath. It should be stressed that Albania, despite the three-way split between guerrillas – communist, nationalist, royalist – self-liberated from Italian and German occupations without Allied or Soviet forces, an achievement underlying Hoxha's abiding efforts to combine nationalism with internationalism, eliding into his famous proclamation of the world's first atheist state – 'The only religion Albanians need is Albanianism'.

Speaking of which, Alia lifted the ban on religion, and the post-communist churches and mosques immediately filled – suggestive, but of what? And, looking at the country's subsequent infestation by American missionaries of the worst kind, one's tempted to think Hoxha had a point.

Hoxha had the right ideas: economic self-sufficiency, full employment, independence from super-power blocs (leaving the Warsaw Pact). He faced something of the same challenge as Stalin, dragging a backwards country into the modern world. Vickers is commendably even-handed in her assessments of his achievements in education (illiteracy eradicated, the country's first university founded), industry, communications (first railways built), and so forth. Collectivised agriculture was less successful, partly due to 'Kulak' resistance, plus frequent floods and earthquakes, also the hostile Northern terrain of the 'Accursed Mountains' (Robert Carver's travelogue title) where the communists failed to suppress the ancestral

blood feuds, now in full swing again.

Vickers (p. 194) somewhat exaggerates Albanian isolationism as having 'hardly any parallel,' thereby ignoring North Korea, plus the fact that, after the breaks with Russia over de-Stalinisation and China for their ideological 'Three Worlds' dispute, Albania was as much isolated against as self-isolating.

Mutated from fascist youth to communist partisan, Ramiz Alia succeeded Hoxha, the reward for keeping his head down and adapting to every ideological twist. Colourless in public, though knowable (up to a point) from his books *Our Enver* and *My Life* (ignored by Vickers), he was widely thought submissive to Hoxha's Iron Lady widow, Nexhmije, as tough an old bird as Elena Ceauşescu and infinitely more intelligent.

Alia in fact tried to ride two difficult horses: public adulation of 'Enverism' whilst relaxing the latter's economic (concessions to private enterprise and property) and political (no new arrests) rigidities, achieved under the label 'adjustments'.

Though openly welcomed by Alia, his regime's downfall was precipitated by Ceauşescu's overthrow in 1989. Despite sudden concessions – lifting the bans on private cars and religion, also removing the name and statues of Stalin – there came a wave of mob burnings of Hoxha's books, students pulling down his giant Tirana statue, and it was all over. Although apparently holding all the aces, the Party had lost its voodoo.

Vickers' final three chapters take us through the new multi-party elections (the communists – surprisingly? – won the first, albeit Alia was voted out), the embassy stormings and mass sea exoduses, the 'Pyramid' anarchy, Berisha's presidencies, plus the trials and (short-lived) imprisonments of Alia, Madame Hoxha, and other (not all) former leading communist lights. As Vickers observes, these were received with widespread indifference, a welcome surprise instead of the predicted bloodbath, given the Albanian passion for resolving feuds and revenge with bullets rather than ballots.

Vickers is far too soft on Sali Berisha, apparently forgetting that she and Pettifer had said in their 1997 book that 'He has claimed, quite inaccurately, that he only met Hoxha twice, and denies he was ever the dictator's personal doctor'. Berisha was an unreconstructed Stalinist. Admitted (1971) to the ruling Party of Labour, he was allowed the rare privilege of foreign travel to Paris and Copenhagen for medical research, and became Professor of Cardiology at the University of Tirana. As Kadare, he accurately judged when it was time to change his colours.

Vickers could and should have said much more about Berisha's 2013 Socialist vanquisher, Edi Rama – astonishingly omitted from the Index. Born in 1964, after a youth devoted to sports, painting, and writing, he had no communist baggage. After entering politics (1998) as Minister of Culture, he was thrice elected Mayor of Tirana before (2005) winning leadership of the Socialist Party. Having trounced Berisha (53% to 36%), and with impressive foreign credentials (a Kofi Annan award for poverty eradication, one of *Time* magazine's 37 'European heroes improving the world') we shall see if and how Rama can render compatible his declared aims of clearing up the previous corruption, getting Albania into the European Union, and pushing the country both backwards and forwards to democratic socialism.

*Barry Baldwin*

## **Socialist Europe**

**Edited by Julian Priestley and Glyn Ford, *Our Europe, Not Theirs*, Lawrence & Wishart, 192 pages, ISBN 9781 907103889, paperback £13.99**

This book brings together the considered views of a number of writers, most of whom have been insiders in the institutions of the European Union (EU), with the addition of four academics specialising in either EU affairs, inequality or related economics. They are all, of course, concerned to halt the present neo-liberal domination of the EU and the direction this enforces. They wish not only to return to the idea of a social Europe as espoused by Jacques Delors, thus ending the policy of austerity, but also to move forward from that with a radical socialist alternative for growth. They are writing, however, in the context of a rapid rise in xenophobic attitudes, feeding an upsurge in right-wing nationalism, resulting in an increased representation of such views in the European Parliament. Many of these new members are bitterly opposed to the very idea of the limited internationalism that the EU stands for. Glyn Ford deals with the issue of right-wing populism and neo-Nazis in an aptly named chapter, 'The mad, the bad and the sad'. Ford's timely reminder of the dangers of UKIP and a fairly extensive review of the parties that make up the extreme European right wing is both informative and worrying in the light of their electoral success. The book predates the European elections of 2014, when the only hopeful sign came from the austerity wracked South, giving a boost to

GUE/NGL (The United European Left/Nordic Green Left) representation in the European Parliament.

The first contribution is Julian Priestley's 'potted' history of the British relationship with the EU, with its discussion centred on the Labour Party (LP) and its often ambivalent attitude to the European project: sometimes outright rejection, but mainly an unenthusiastic acceptance of its necessity. The author appeals to Labour to embrace a radical European policy for expansion. However, I fear there is more than a residual tendency, in much of the Labour Movement, to replay the old records of the 1970s, when many saw the EU as a rich man's club. To complicate the situation, we now have migrant EU workers competing for 'British jobs', encouraging a populist reaction duly fanned by sections of the media – internationalism is still not an easy concept to get across. We can see these pressures at work when Len McCluskey, the leader of UNITE, calls for Labour to offer an 'in-out' referendum to match the Tories.

Derek Reed has two essays, setting out a strategy for change and also tackling the problem of reshaping the EU economy. He dwells at some length on criticism of the existing neo-liberal policy of austerity, with its blind belief in self-healing markets, reflecting that global leaders are beginning 'to acknowledge the cost of the market-led revolution'. Amongst these apostates we do not find George Osborne, who basks in the approbation of the International Monetary Fund, although Christine Lagarde publicly worries about 'inequality ... the defining issue of our time'. Both Reed's contributions repay a close reading.

Patrick Costello mounts a half-hearted and oblique defence of Blair's idea of Western (EU) intervention, espoused in 1999 regarding Kosovo and the attack on Serbia. In general, the EU's foreign policy seems to follow the lead of the United States and NATO, and when it does act (such as over Ukraine) it shows little or no sensitivity towards Russia, its fellow European power. On the southern flank, Costello reminds us that the EU's record of support for North African dictators such as Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali of Tunisia was, perhaps, not the best choice of allies. The writer, after pointing out that the EU spends 20% of the world's expenditure on armaments, seems to bewail the fact that the RAF has only a quarter of the combat aircraft it had in the 1970s. In general, the author claims that having an EU foreign policy allows the UK to punch above its weight, but I must admit to being more than a little worried as to where these punches might land, and whether a pugilistic approach to foreign affairs is what the EU requires.

Linda McAvan berates EU governments for cutting back on measures to

combat climate change, questioning whether such measures are only for the good times. Nick Costello delivers a trenchant attack on the measures taken to weaken social provision within the EU. Derek Reed, on reshaping the EU economy, states that it will require what amounts to a re-regulation of financial markets; stopping tax avoidance; empowering workers through labour market reform; a comprehensive energy strategy; an embracing of the digital economy and growth based on research and development.

This is an important book, which attempts to cover many of the issues that will face a Labour Government if it regains power. It has a two-fold aim: firstly, to defend the EU and its potentiality against the present wave of euro-scepticism and, secondly, to suggest and encourage a debate on the European Union's future. The reader will probably find much to agree with, as well as some areas for disagreement, but few could deny that it does provide a call to action and a stimulus to the continuing debate about what a socialist policy for the European Union might look like.

*John Daniels*

## **Cameron's European Policy**

*The UK's PM has been found out, as Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski revealed to former Finance Minister Rostowski, earlier in 2014.*

**Rostowski:** [Cameron] thinks he'll go renegotiate and come back, no Polish government could agree to it. Except in return for a mountain of gold.

**Sikorski:** It's either a very badly thought through move or, not for the first time, a kind of incompetence in European affairs. Remember? He fucked up the fiscal pact. He fucked it up. Simple as that. He is not interested, he does not get it, he believes in the stupid propaganda, he stupidly tries to play the system ... his whole strategy of feeding [his critics] scraps in order to satisfy them is just as I predicted, turning against him; he should have said, fuck off, tried to convince people and isolate [the sceptics]. But he ceded the field to those that are now embarrassing him.

*Translation:*

*<http://www.openeuropeblog.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/leaked-tapes-shed-light-on-difficult.html>*