

Reviews

The Knight versus the Knaves

Sir Michael Barber, *How to Run a Government – so that citizens benefit and taxpayers don't go crazy*, Allen Lane, 2015, 368 pages, ISBN 9780241004975, £16.99

Sir Michael Barber has come a long way since he worked, briefly, as a teacher and thence as head of education at the UK National Union of Teachers. First he was snapped up as an education adviser by Tony Blair, then with New Labour in government, he became head of delivery for just about everything. Indeed he even invented the term 'deliverology' to describe what he does. However, it is in education where Barber has really made his mark. Before I go on to review his latest work therefore, perhaps it would be helpful to give a brief overview of the education movement for which he is one of the most senior power brokers.

The Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM as it is not so affectionately known by teacher activists, has infected education systems, as its name suggests, globally. Its chief advocates are education corporations such as the mighty Pearson (for whom Barber is the chief education adviser), international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank, and neoliberal politicians. Its central narrative is that education is the way to solve the problem of poverty. This conveniently absolves the capitalist system, of which these advocates are some of the primary beneficiaries, of any responsibility for the unequal economic and social relations, which are its true cause. Moreover, it provides ready-made scapegoats for poverty, in the shape of state schools, teachers and, especially, teachers' unions. The putative failure of these groups to 'solve' the problem of poverty drives a series of solutions which make up the architecture of the GERM. These are accountability measures, which demand huge quantities of data, standardised testing and curricula. The data in turn determine such issues as teacher tenure and pay, as well as judgements on the success or failure of state schools. Privatisation, either through vouchers or through chains of private schools, is seen as an ideal way of overcoming state school 'failure'. The purpose of education is framed as the development of human capital and it is to that that the standardised curricula are geared. Teachers lose their professional autonomy and become deliverers of pre-determined content. Teaching unions, which are seen as the main block to the GERM, are to be taken on,

sidelined or defeated. Education budgets are cut in line with the requirements of capital for lower taxation. And, of course, corporations such as Pearson, who produce the testing materials, the software, the lesson plans and the teaching materials, as well as chains of private schools, make a vast turnover from an 'industry' which has been identified as 'the last frontier for profit'.

Given Barber's central role in advocating GERM, it comes as no surprise to find that this book takes it as read that the neoliberal playbook of privatisation and austerity is just what the poor need to get out of poverty. He expects to 'see markets becoming steadily more important in meeting the needs and aspirations of citizens'. Prime Ministers are really just like 'CEOs of companies'. Tony Blair's introduction of the market into health and Thatcher's selling off of council houses were all 'truly transformational' (in a good way, of course). Indeed, says Barber, 'the ideological debate should be over by now'. This goes, too, for continuing austerity, or to put it in GERM speak, 'the primacy of outcomes over inputs' or, more prosaically, 'more for less'. Because, as Barber helpfully explains, 'corporate taxation ... is becoming ever more difficult to collect as corporations become globalised'. Far from being a problem to be tackled, this is seen as simply a fact, and so the answer is improving the 'productivity of public services'.

It is therefore no surprise to find the book full of praise for a cast of neoliberal pundits and politicians. Words like 'brilliant', 'towering', 'heroic', 'stellar' are generously attributed to such figures as Tony Blair, Andrew Adonis and Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education; education 'reformers' such as Joel Klein, Paul Vallas and Cami Anderson; and an assortment of political leaders from the global South, such as Sebastian Pinera of Chile or Najib Razac of Malaysia. He is not sparing, either, in praise for himself, quoting a *Times* article, for example, where the journalist says, 'the most important words came not from Tony Blair but from Michael Barber'. To be fair, Barber does also quote one journalist who compares a presentation from him 'as comparable to a lecture from the speaking clock', but fortunately his self-regard is adequate to the task and he takes this 'as confirmation that I was doing my job'. (It is doubtful that any self-respecting teacher would feel the same way, but let that pass.)

This obsessive name-dropping would be mildly amusing or irritating, depending on one's tolerance levels, if it weren't for the fact that Barber makes it clear that he has the ear of most of the movers and shakers he lauds, and there is every reason to believe him. To give one example of his influence, he has been financed, at great expense, by the Department for International Development to 'reform' education in the Pakistani Punjab.

He prescribes the standard GERM remedies: privatisation, vouchers, data collection, performance related pay and tenure, standardised lessons and testing. As usual, his self-belief is, as he might say, stellar; 'the progress has been remarkable'. His enthusiasm is not shared, however, by most of the teachers in the Punjab. There have been many strikes against the 'reforms' and, in particular, against the poverty pay of teachers and the fact that a huge number of them are on even worse-paid temporary contracts. One such strike is ongoing as I write.

This brings me on to consider Barber's attitude to teachers and, in particular, their unions. He divides those involved in education into two groups: producers (teachers and their unions) and consumers (parents and pupils). It is, he says, the consumers who must be considered, not the producers, who tend to have a 'vested interest' and who 'constantly demand increased pay, better conditions, decreased workload or more support'. The idea that all of those things might also be in the interest of the 'consumers' clearly has not occurred to him. Neither has the irony of his attacking teachers' unions for claiming more of the share of taxation for public education, while the corporation he is a highly paid employee of is claiming its share of the public purse, in order to feed its bottom line. If there are vested interests in education, other than those of communities, parents, teachers and pupils, the most egregious ones must surely be those of education corporations.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that this book drips with contempt for teachers. He quotes with horror a Labour politician who says on the radio that 'each teacher knows best in her own classroom', a policy which, he says, has caused the 'plateau' in education in the post-war period. On the other hand, he has nothing but praise for a US school principal who tells her superintendent that he should 'studiously ignore' all complaints for a two month period. He acknowledges that in Finland the policy of 'trust and altruism' towards teachers appears to have worked, but asserts that Finland is 'highly unusual' and quips to governments 'don't try this at home'. At one point he suggests the nuclear option, quoting from the play *Main Street* – 'And you want to reform people like that when dynamite is so cheap?'

If he is contemptuous of teachers in the North, he is downright libellous of many in the global South. He blithely asserts, that 'a quarter of India's teachers do not turn up on any given day'. This is a canard which is frequently quoted in the global media, and one which totally ignores the factors which lead to teacher 'absenteeism'. In South Asia, in so far as it exists, a huge factor is the amount of non-educational tasks such as census taking, organising elections, vaccination campaigns and many more which

take teachers out of school, often for several days, and with no substitute teachers when they are out. Moreover, there are no substitute teachers when permanent staff are on maternity leave or ill. Add to that the poverty pay and often appalling conditions in state schools, and the miracle is not that there is some 'absenteeism' but that teachers manage to teach at all. Of the teachers of Ghana, he asserts that the government 'pays teachers well'. He then goes on to slate their competence and commitment on the basis of one anecdote, and states that 'the government is paying for knights and getting knaves'. This insult from a man who, reportedly, was paid £4,000 a day for advising the Punjab government, dismissing Ghana's teachers as knaves, who are on poverty pay and sometimes unpaid for months, and who are working in oversized classes in crumbling schools, is staggering. But then, of course, Barber knows all about the difference between knights and knaves – having himself been knighted by the Queen.

Like all those in the GERM camp, Barber is very clear what constitutes the main 'block' to reform – it is teachers' unions. And in this book he advocates the same tactics as the World Bank – attempt to sideline them if possible, don't allow them to 'drag you into a mud-wrestle in which you and they become equivalent'. Create a 'story' which bigs up the GERM narrative in order to get the community on your side. However, he admits this is not easy. If only communities wouldn't allow themselves to 'become dependent' on public services. If only you could get them to support a 'major government reform'. Alas, he admits, 'you risk being accused of softening up the service for cuts and abdicating responsibility'. Which, of course, is not surprising because, as I have shown above, Barber believes that cuts are necessary and privatisation is the answer.

This is a tedious book and, in many ways, a depressing one, given the degree of influence Barber and education corporations have on school systems globally. However, there is a glimmer of hope. It is not so easy, as Barber admits, to get communities on your side. And despite not having access to the mass media, teachers and their unions have the huge advantage of being embedded in local communities globally and are often some of their most respected members. Together, teachers and their school communities represent a powerful and potentially unstoppable force. This is not the place to detail some of the amazing initiatives by communities, particularly in Latin America, to forge a different kind of education reform, one which takes as its starting point the transformative power of education to create critical and creative thinkers, who can question and change the deeply unjust and unequal economic and social conditions in which we all live and which cause so much misery. But, be sure that even Barber knows

that teachers and unions, working with communities, represent the biggest threats to the GERM and similar neoliberal policies.

In a very revealing passage, the author talks of the time when he introduced the so-called ‘literacy hour’ into English schools, a typical de-professionalising, top-down policy from his unit. He talks about the ‘awful feeling’ on the morning it was to be introduced:

‘Would there be a boycott? Would there be demonstrations? Or worse still, what if in spite of all the training that had already taken place, the primary teachers of England just carried on doing what they’d always done? What would government do then? How powerless would I (sic) be? To be ignored: surely a worse fate than to be resisted.’

As it happens, the policy came in and there was no organised resistance. But both Barber’s self-identification with government and his fear of union action are clear indications of the battle lines. Increasingly, corporate interests are occupying government at the same time as those resisting are beginning to occupy the squares.

If you, like me, believe that another world is possible and that the biggest ‘block’ to that world is the interests of global capital, read this book so that you can know your enemy. Or, alternatively, just take my word for it, unless you want a lecture from a particularly self-regarding speaking clock.

Mary Compton

Spotted Owls

Robert W. McChesney, *Blowing the Roof Off the Twenty-First Century: Media, Politics and the Struggle for Post-Capitalist Democracy*, Monthly Review Press, 2014, 272 pages, hardback ISBN 9781583674789, £22

This is a series of essays that have been revised and dressed up as a book and it shows; it is by no means ‘seamless’. The first few chapters go over the problems of the US over the last 15-20 years: the wars, the military-industrial-political complex, the corruption, the growing inequality, the marginalisation of social services, the power of corporations and banks, the crash of 2008, etc. There is nothing new here but might be useful to those who missed out on Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, Gore Vidal, William Blum, Mark Curtis et al. I would sooner go back to them; they are better writers.

The author makes clear the US is a democracy in name only, preferring

to call it a dollarocracy. He goes into ‘economics’ in some technical detail, but clearly enough so that even your ‘economics-illiterate’ reviewer could understand. He often refers to economic ‘stagnation’ and wonders ‘how can capitalists be so short-sighted as to oppose the use of government to build infrastructure, create jobs and end stagnation?’ After all, a reasonably vibrant economy puts more money in the population’s pockets so they can consume more and add to corporation profits. But no, stagnation and apathy present a lesser threat.

‘Warren Buffett, one of the three or four wealthiest persons in the world ... called attention to the absurd situation that he was paying a lower income tax rate than his employees ... “Legislators in Washington,” Buffett wrote, “feel compelled to protect” mega-rich people like himself “as if we were spotted owls or some other endangered species”.’

That says it all.

Probably the most interesting chapter is the one on America’s penal system. Just as its military spending makes up half of the world’s military expenditure (the other 50% comes from the spending of all the other armed forces of the world combined), so the USA accounts for almost a quarter of the world’s prisoners, yet has only 5% of the world’s population. America’s gulag is, of course, a form of social control, especially in times of financial crisis. It keeps the poor in their place and it is the poor who make up most of the prison population, the majority black, followed by Latinos, then by whites. I was astonished to learn recently, though this book doesn’t mention it, that there are 1,500 on Death Row.

The prison service is lucrative business, too, as it is increasingly privatised. One Virginia mayor is quoted:

‘I can get \$600,000 from the state for a new jail, but I can’t get \$40 for “Healthy Families”,’ (a public health programme for infants).

You can skip the interview with the author, a self-serving piece on his involvement with ‘alternative media’. It’s important, of course, but fairly harmless, otherwise it wouldn’t be tolerated. It is a spit in the bucket compared to the onslaught of corporate controlled mass media. Likewise, the self-congratulatory tone in ‘The State of Media and Media Reform’ in which he states what a brilliant interviewer and interviewee he was.

McChesney’s chapter on ‘Walter Lippman and the Crisis of Journalism’ is more interesting; a brief history of journalism and Walter Lippman is its hero. There is no doubt about it, Lippman was a great journalist, and the author overlooks his ‘elitism’ because Lippman was an idealist who tried

to clean up journalism's act and make it a proper profession:

'Reporters needed to create and enforce a professional "code of honour", similar to that adopted and enforced by the professional associations of lawyers and doctors.'

The idealism is undeniable and admirable but, today, seems like pie-in-the-sky.

Part four, 'Bringing it all Back Home', with a long chapter on 'The Cultural Apparatus of Monopoly Capital' is superb. It is the most academic part of the book, guilty of some jargon, so the start is heavy going. But keep at it; it's worth while. For a start, he quotes extensively from C. Wright Mills, E.P. Thompson, Erich Fromm, Raymond Williams and Herbert Marcuse, all brilliant and lucid writers. He is also very good on the decline of the book. I remember, many years ago, being shocked at learning that there were more video shops in the UK than bookshops. Video, of course, is now old technology, along with 78 rpm records, LPs, EPs and cassettes, and the book looks ready to follow the scroll. A note of pessimism enters:

'We are back at the state of the Utopians pure and simple; a better world there should be but there ain't no social force in sight to bring it about.' (Paul Baran on Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*)

And:

'The idea of an alternative culture is radical but limited. It can very easily become a marginal culture; even, at worst, a tolerated play area. It is always certainly inefficient unless it is linked with effective opposition to the dominant system, under which the majority of people are living.' (Raymond Williams)

This is interesting because it contradicts the author's own rather mawkish, upbeat, over-optimistic introduction. There is an air of desperation ('It's not hopeless! No, really, it isn't!'). This is his reaction to the despair he encounters on his lecture tours. He points to the abolition of the slave trade and slavery, and the end of Apartheid. Well, it is true that black Africans are no longer shipped across the ocean and forced to work on cotton and sugar plantations. It is not true that slavery has ended. It is now called 'human trafficking', and it is up there with drugs, arms, oil and pharmaceuticals.

The end of Apartheid has not brought black Africans out of poverty or stopped the violence. South Africa is now ruled by a black corrupt élite which sends in black police to shoot down striking black miners (a black version of Sharpeville).

A little panic-stricken, the author continues:

‘People rarely accurately predict social change, it is almost always a surprise ... No one saw the Madison uprising coming, or Occupy.’

Rather parochial thinking, don't you think? These were hardly world-shattering events and flopped anyway. The massacre of students in Tiananmen Square, while it got world attention, changed nothing. In both cases, look who is still in charge.

Perhaps the two most unexpected, world-shattering events of our times were, firstly, the take-over of Cuba by a small, battered band of guerrillas. Some 60 years later, after massive repression throughout Latin America and the Caribbean with its dirty wars, invasions and ‘disappeared’, the Cuban government survives, and there is a resurgence of Bolívar-type resistance throughout the continent; maybe a glimmer of hope there.

Secondly, there was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both were hailed as a triumph for ‘Western values’, a victory for the ‘international community’, i.e. the countries dominated by the USA; the anti-Christ had been defeated. And what happened? Russia was ruled by gangsters and the life-expectancy of Russians dropped significantly while the West went to permanent war and went bust. We now have round two of the Cold War.

‘Ah,’ you say, ‘but there *is* hope: look at the new Greek government and the rise of Podemos in Spain, that heralds real change.’ Maybe, and maybe it will be a change we hadn't contemplated: a return of the Greek colonels and another Spanish civil war?

Nigel Potter

Being St Ann's

Lisa McKenzie, *Getting By: Estates, class and culture in austerity Britain*, Policy Press, 2015, 224 pages, paperback ISBN 9781447309956, £14.99

St Ann's is mainly a 1970s council estate in Nottingham. *Getting By* is based on Lisa McKenzie's experiences of living there and researching what white women with mixed race children think about their lives and this area. More recently, she has added another dimension to her work, including the black men who live there too. McKenzie's work is based on ‘new St Ann's’, but this area was built on the wreckage of ‘old St Ann's’, which housed Nottingham's lace workers in the nineteenth century. ‘Old St Ann's’ was first

researched by a team of adult education and university student volunteers led by Ken Coates and Richard Silburn in the late 1960s with the findings eventually published as *Poverty: the Forgotten Englishmen* (1970). Lisa McKenzie read that book and decided that the time was right to find out how the area's current residents felt about themselves and 'new St Ann's'.

In 1966, visiting St Ann's was described by Coates and Silburn as akin to stepping back into the pages of Dickens or Gissing. As they put it, 'long black slum terraces crawled along cobbled streets' with thousands of mainly two-bedroom Victorian houses crammed into a two mile area, close to the city centre. Most had outside toilets, no hot water and no bathrooms. Rubbish, large numbers of dogs and rats were commonplace. Cracked sewers and leaking roofs, thin walls (allowing little privacy) and rotting floors were not unusual. Originally built for Nottingham's industrial white working-class, by the late 1960s it also had become home to Italians, Poles, Jamaicans, Pakistanis, Irish, Scottish and Welsh people, who moved here to find work. Pubs abounded and corner shops were 'open all hours', including those catering for Italians, Poles, West Indians and Chinese. Open-air markets sold anything. Pawnshops bought anything, even pawn tickets. But the council had started seeing St Ann's as an area where they could re-house 'problem families'. 'Vagrants' had invited themselves in, too, dossing in the many houses left empty as they became literally uninhabitable. The future of 'old St Ann's' was becoming increasingly uncertain.

'New St Ann's' is the council estate that replaced the 30,000 houses, pubs and shops that disappeared when 'old St Ann's' was demolished as part of Nottingham City Council's slum clearance programme in the early 1970s. The Wimpey-built mainly council-owned housing is much better quality now than the old slums, though only 14,000 people live in 'new St Ann's'. Over the years, residents' initial pride in their gleaming homes and the area's modern image has diminished. Some addresses are hard to find, even for delivery van drivers and taxi firms. This is not surprising given the design of the estate, which McKenzie describes as

'... rows and rows of the same ... grey concrete pebbledash houses, flats and two-storey maisonettes ... suspended on footbridges on several levels, [which] reach each other through underpasses and subways, which are often very dark and covered in rubbish and debris.'

The St Ann's Well Road, the main road running across the estate, was a 'vibrant shopping centre' in 'old St Ann's'. It is now a busy but 'soulless' commuter road from the city centre out towards the suburbs. There are few local shops and deteriorating community facilities. The Co-op and the

community laundrette closed in 2012. The Co-op's premises are empty: the laundrette has become St Ann's food bank. The last pub in St Ann's closed its doors in 2013. If this was not starkly depressing enough, the area's reputation in the local and national media has been troubled. There are high levels of unemployment and poverty, but 'new St Ann's' is also 'known' for crime, drug-dealing, prostitution and gang violence, and media stories regularly appear which seem to confirm this picture.

That said, St Ann's is still the first place in Nottingham where many newcomers come looking for a home or work (or both). They may settle for a while, if not permanently. Fifty years on, the newcomers are from Eastern Europe, Somalia and the Middle East, but varying degrees of welcome and friction between old and new residents and different ethnic groups remains. Nearly three-quarters of school pupils in the area have a minority ethnic background (African, Afro-Caribbean, small numbers of Asian and Chinese). Mixed-race pupils are in the majority.

In McKenzie's view, in 2014, St Ann's is 'as much about being Jamaican as it is about the white working-class'. Many long-established West Indian families are highly respected because their family connections reach back to the 1950s and 1960s and 'old St Ann's'. Local white women and black Jamaican men have married or lived together since then. There are now many white women bringing up mixed-race children in St Ann's. Many Jamaican men have become husbands, partners or, as McKenzie calls them, 'babyfathers'. What did they think about themselves, their children and the area?

McKenzie found that most of the women wanted to talk about how St Ann's was viewed by outsiders, but many also commented on how they were seen, too, as women living in the area. Louise's Irish family came to St Ann's in the 1950s when she was a child. In 1970, they were one of the first to be re-housed in a 'new St Ann's' council house. They believed their new home was 'posh', but over the years their attitude has changed. Louise commented: 'when you tell people where you come from, yeah, you feel like you know that they like class you like rough and ready'. Partly, this is a reflection on the area and its reputation (which affects all women living in St Ann's), but this is also linked to the way women with mixed-race children are viewed. Not only are they working-class white women (which currently de-feminises them into 'rough' women), they are also women who have had sexual relations with black men. Because of this association, evidenced by their mixed-race children, they are regarded as 'slags' or 'prostitutes' by outsiders, 'tainted' or lacking in morals. This is not new. Shirley, whose eldest daughter is now 30, said that when she first started

dating black men, she was told 'no white man will touch you now'.

These destructive attitudes never surface within St Ann's, a place where women with mixed-race children are accepted as 'normal'. St Ann's is 'home, community and also their place of safety'. It is also where they feel valued as mothers. Many of the women talked about 'being St Ann's' (in relation to the place and the people) and how important it is to them. Finding personal value on the estate is about 'mixing' but only in certain ways. Currently, McKenzie has identified 'insiders' (who are probably mainly white but could belong to any ethnic group), Jamaicans (who are regarded as a valuable resource), and 'outsiders' who are 'culturally foreign'. 'Outsiders' include Iraqis, some Eastern Europeans and Africans and, while new boundaries are being erected against them (sometimes with actual physical violence), the boundaries between the white community and Jamaican community have long gone. But it is the culture of black Jamaican masculinity that is particularly valued.

'Mixing' has been occurring for fifty years between the white (including Irish) and Jamaican families. A 'hybrid' or 'interchangeable' culture is being created, which itself is constantly changing. The 'hybrid' culture in evidence now includes ways of speaking (Jamaican words), dressing with style (gold jewellery and expensive designer clothes), black hairstyles, taste in music, how you cook and what you eat (especially rice 'n' peas 'n' chicken). Mixed-race children are loved and valued, not just as beautiful children, but also because they are an indication of 'mixing' – they are 'multi-cultural' in a way that white children can never be.

When women moved outside the area, they felt differently about themselves, especially when they deal with statutory organisations. McKenzie thought a woman's respectability was the first casualty in these exchanges. Gina said she did not usually feel 'poor' or 'excluded', but when she came into contact with officials who wanted her address and personal details, she felt that her status as a lone parent, her mixed-race children, and her home in St Ann's were weighed up, in what was often a pause. 'I know what they're thinking you can see it ticking over in their brain as you wait for them to think "oh, it's one of them from there".' Other women commented that they were 'looked down on' and consequently 'never felt good enough'. As McKenzie comments, this often unavoidable contact is hurtful, damaging and disrespectful. No wonder St Ann's itself is regarded by these women as a safe place for them.

Nearly half of the working-age population in St Ann's is unemployed with young mixed-race and African-Caribbean men and women particularly likely to be without formal employment. McKenzie found that

many of the men she spoke to were literally off every agency's radar as they had no official addresses and avoided claiming benefits, preferring to work part-time or have 'little runnings' (a Jamaican word for dealings or business). Alternatively, they might 'hussle', selling drugs, cannabis, steroids, Viagra, cocaine, crack or heroin and sometimes stolen goods.

'Business' was important to all of them, including 'chatting business', regularly talking to each other on their Blackberries to find out what was happening to friends, family and a myriad of contacts on the estate. They often 'passed by' their partner's, girlfriend's or mother's homes, always checking before they arrived (to avoid officialdom) and never staying long. 'Passing by' like this 'meant a lifestyle and a transient identity on the estate for the men', but it was also intrinsically linked to their different understanding of 'being St Ann's'. It was about reducing risk and maintaining territory.

McKenzie found that getting a job (assuming one was available) might be a problem for these men. If it was low-paid and low-skilled, it might reduce their status and the respect in which they were held by friends and family. This carried too much risk and potential loss to be contemplated. Typical of many of the men McKenzie spoke to about getting a job was Dread. He is a middle-aged African Caribbean man who divides his time between his own flat and that of his partner. He commented:

'There's no jobs here for anyone, what can I do now, I used to work for the council as a gardener, I liked that but that's gone now, I'm not doing no gay job in a call centre.'

His partner's 19-year-old son, Raphel, sold drugs. Although potentially lucrative, Dread could see no point in Raphel feuding over drug territory outside St Ann's. It was dangerous enough within the estate. His advice to him weighed up losses and risks:

'... there's enough crackheads for all of you to sell drugs to them, let's be honest about it here ... there's enough crackheads for all of you to make money without dying, let's be honest ... killing each other doesn't make sense, life's hard enough here, just do your business and done.'

Della was just relieved that her son was still alive and making some money.

Most of the women were 'extremely angry and worried' about the amount of drug-dealing and drug use on the estate, which had been growing for over twenty years and which they felt was made worse by the number of dark alleyways and layout of the estate itself. At the same time, McKenzie shows that there is

'a kind of acceptance that it was ... another part of the fabric of the estate, and many of the women had involvements weak and strong in the drug economy in

St Ann's because of friends, family members, neighbours and sometimes even their own involvement.'

It is important to say that this is not unique to St Ann's, but McKenzie indicates just how commonplace drug use and drug dealing have become in the area if you know what you are looking for.

There is much more in *Getting By*, but space precludes a more detailed review. McKenzie has, on the whole, managed to transform several academic pieces of work, including her doctorate, into an accessible book full of humanity and honesty about St Ann's and some of the people who live there. This is no mean feat: writing for a new and potentially non-academic audience is hard. For this reason, it might have been better to include more commentary on the significance of Pierre Bourdieu for the uninitiated. The proofreading could have been stronger, too, in places ('deficit' or 'deficient'?) But these suggestions are for the future: what this book says about St Ann's is far more important.

Looking at 'old St Ann's' (in Coates and Silburn) and 'new St Ann's' (in McKenzie) it is possible to see what has been gained and lost. Better housing (albeit with poor layouts) has replaced slums, but community organisations, markets and shops have disappeared. A new hybrid culture has grown between the white and Jamaican communities, replacing old antagonisms, but new ones are surfacing between established residents and newcomers. The drug economy (and associated violence) has grown, too. The residents interviewed by McKenzie have been 'getting by' despite all this. But some have gone to prison and some have died. People at the end of their tethers, in a corner with little or nothing to hope for (not even family life), can explode in sudden anger, as she points out. In the last five years, Cameron and company have pushed people and created places that are now close to the edge, including St Ann's. Where do we go from here? Unfortunately, this is anyone's guess.

Cathy Davis

Ferocious Love

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate*, 576 pages, Allen Lane, hardback ISBN 9781846145056, £20.00, Penguin, paperback ISBN 9780241956182, £8.99

In the context of *This Changes Everything*, there are several ways of looking at climate change. There are the straightforward deniers; and then

those who say the problem can be solved by the ingenuity of humankind. In the chapter on 'Green Billionaires', for example, two such techniques are mentioned: a machine for the physical extraction of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and a device for the deflection of the sun's rays. Finally, there are those who, like the author, think there is just enough time, with the available sustainable technology, to hold warming below 2° centigrade, with the small proviso that we abolish capitalism, certainly in its present neoliberal manifestation. Naomi Klein has written a book that she hopes will be a clarion call to all the progressive forces, trade unionists, community activists, socialists and environmentalists to converge in this effort, not just to save the planet but to transform our relationship with each other and with the planet. If you find the idea daunting then, unfortunately, there is the added problem that we haven't got all that long to achieve the necessary transformation.

This Changes Everything should, however, excite our optimism as, apart from the sheer logic of its argument, the author has spent the last six years researching and visiting people at the sharp end of the struggle to halt climate change. Her anecdotal comments serve to show the extent of protest around the globe, where thousands, possibly millions, are on the march against the activities of the fossil fuel corporate behemoths. For example, there is a momentous battle raging across Canada and the USA to halt the Keystone XL Pipeline System, which is planned to transport highly corrosive tar sands across a swathe of the North American continent. The Republican dominated Senate is trying to overturn the veto that the equivocating Obama finally placed on the project.

Put simply, Klein's thesis is that after wasting most of the years from the late 1980s to the present, through governmental inertia and failure to agree, a period when more modest adjustments could have been made, we are now faced with just enough time to halt a global temperature rise of 2° centigrade if the following steps are taken. This has been called the 'procrastination penalty' for now a radical response is required necessitating the complete abandonment of neoliberalism, in fact the abolition of capitalism itself. To prevent global climate catastrophe, measures need to be taken that are anathema to neoliberal capitalism. We have to have a world where small-scale planned resources are democratically decided, where transport is communal not individual, where rampant inequality is curtailed by wealth redistribution, where agriculture is designed to feed *all* the world's population, where the pursuit of growth and profit are replaced by ecological virtues, and where humanistic, altruistic values replace those of the dominating competitive

ethos of the market. Klein calls it 'ferocious love', and calls for the 'regeneration of society'. No wonder Lord Lawson says 'Green is the new Red'. It has to be a society that cares deeply about the shape of the future we leave for posterity, and that treats the Earth with respect and not as a storehouse to plunder. Pretty heady stuff this, but the author thinks that millions of people are near to breaking with this riven world of ours.

There are two principal factors here: is Man capable of such an altruistic endeavour and can enough people be convinced that climate change is such a pressing danger? On the first point, Klein quotes the experience of wartime, particularly during World War Two; but, whilst there were many remarkable examples of collective solidarity and bravery, was it more the result of the wartime state monopoly of the media, the state welding the national effort, and the brutal nature and immediacy of the enemy? Climate change, at least in the advanced nations, is not likely to have the same impact on the popular mind as a world war and, while parts of Africa and the Middle East are enveloped in bloody chaos, we have seen the hostility there can be to migrants, across Europe. The present ruling élite in the developed world is mesmerised by markets as an automatic solution, and can see no other way forward. They establish international conferences, committees and investigatory bodies whose final statements may dominate the media for a few days, but show few signs of creating the urgency needed in the corridors of power. Their much vaunted market mechanisms for dealing with emissions, (the carbon offset and trading markets), turned into a flop as far as reducing emissions, but at the same time made a lot of money for some investors in highly dubious ventures. So it would take a major miracle for the political and economic élites to countenance the freeing up of the media to explain the dramatic nature of the danger from climate change. The whole of the neoliberal philosophy and its attendant institutions are lined up against the sort of radical solution the author has in mind.

It is, however, those same advanced nations who would have to take the unpleasant medicine first. The reason being that they are amongst the highest emitters but possess the civil infrastructure to cope with a sudden drop in power output. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, by shutting off the major part of these emissions there would be a massive immediate effect, hopefully preventing reaching the 2° increase ceiling. Neither is it the case that in Klein's schema the populace of the developed nations would have its standard of living cut dramatically. It probably means a standard of living that needs to fall to the equivalent norms of the 1970s; not too hard a time for those of us who lived through that period and, of

course, hopefully, many things would be better. However, it is going to take an enormous effort to get people in the advanced European countries to think in the radical terms necessary and come to equate the vagaries of the present day weather with a more generalised threat of catastrophic climate change. In this context the International Energy Agency has warned that if, by 2017, steps have not been taken to bring emissions under control then the prospects for life on Earth are bleak indeed.

Naomi Klein's best example of the correct steps being taken is the small-scale energy developments where local groups take the grassroots initiatives. In Germany, local authorities in Munich and Hamburg have made a stand against privatisation, voting to instigate their own brand of 'municipal socialism' by not allowing the utilities to own their gas, electricity and communal heating systems, keeping it in civic ownership. There has been a very significant boost to renewable energy in Germany, as well as the phasing out of nuclear power. Unbelievably, green energy programmes have even been targeted by the World Trade Organization for being protectionist and cossetting programmes for reasons of national trade; there have also been projects attacked by the WTO in Klein's home country, Canada; China filed a complaint over wind power schemes in Italy and Greece; and India has also fallen foul of WTO rules for the same reason.

This Changes Everything has exhaustive analysis of the climate-change-deniers and their association with corporate wealth, in particular the wealth of the big emitters: the oil, mining and transport industries. There are billionaires who give generously to institutions pouring out climate change denial propaganda and they are also mentioned, but it is a sad fact that whilst these deniers have been comprehensively defeated in the scientific argument, their ideology of greed and selfishness is still euphemistically sanctified in the everyday life of commerce. Then, of course, there are the 'green billionaires', Branson and Gates for example, who encourage 'geo-engineering', deflectors in space, carbon capture machines, or the fall-back position of colonising Mars if things get too hot on Earth. Klein thinks we can dismiss these as storylines that befit the latest sci-fi Hollywood blockbuster.

In two books, *No Logo* and *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein had established herself globally as a powerful international critic of neoliberal economics and power, and the consumerist culture. She makes the case that the pressure for social change necessitates a conjoining of existing movements and that climate change is the way to make the connections between North and South, from the anti-fracking protestors and the landless workers kicked off their land by the encroachment of transnational agribusiness to the localised power communities taking back resources

from privatisation. The movement should be about a ‘global push’ for liberation, equality and community involvement as the only mechanisms for rescuing us from disastrous climate change. Within civil society the division between ‘activists’ and ‘regular people’ should be broken down in communities under threat, the native North Americans being an example. This movement will not win the argument by contrasting the costs of sustainable schemes with those of marketised carbon counting: the movement needs to take the moral high ground and show that we want a better world for our children and we do not want to bequeath them a poisoned chalice. No doubt there will be another crisis, which may bring us all out on the streets again, but this time, in the words of the author –

‘It must be the catalyst to actually build a world that will keep us safe. The stakes are simply too high, and time too short to settle for anything less.’

John Daniels

Grand Tourer

Edited by Glenn Ligon, with Alex Farquharson and Francesco Manacorda, *Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions*, Nottingham Contemporary and Tate, 2015, 284 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849763561, £24.99

Where once there was ‘Bear’, Steve McQueen’s muscular video, now hangs Franz Hals’ ‘Portrait of a Man’. During summer 2015, it’s as though Nottingham Contemporary is sub-let to the fabulously wealthy Stoker Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire and denizen of Chatsworth. Where, during the chilly spring, Glenn Ligon challenged us with his self-curated ‘museum’ of intimacy, connection and black warmth, now, in the dog days of July and August, we are translated to the pannelled luxury ‘goods’ purloined, purchased or otherwise obtained by ‘well-off’ scions of the House of Cavendish. Pablo Bronstein, with an auctioneer’s eye, has assembled some 60 pieces of ‘incalculable’ value. Such treasures sit amidst Bronstein’s own Chatsworth-in-Space, *Star Wars* like, and along his *Via Appia*, conjuring Shelley’s *Ozymandias*:

‘Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!’

Juxtaposition is a hallmark of the Contemporary’s ‘challenging’ programme, as Glenn Ligon called it when recounting his response to



director Alex Farquharson's invitation to curate what became his stunning show, *Encounters and Collisions*, now transferred to Tate Liverpool. Previously, two of the Contemporary's four galleries featured one show, such as Thomas Demand's large-scale photographs, in 2012, while galleries three and four, which look outside onto High Pavement, were given over to *Decolonising Architecture Art Residency*, which liberated Palestine in the heart of England.

This year, juxtaposition is more temporal than spatial.

Time and again, one was

drawn back to *Encounters and Collisions* and the centrality of James Baldwin's presence on the edge of figurative and abstract in Beauford Delaney's scintillating portrait (above), across the room from the coal dust, oil and polymer of 'Stranger 23', Glenn Ligon's sparkling, large-scale black surface, which takes its title from Baldwin's luminous writing. *The Grand Tour*, which has brought Chatsworth to town, has a more centrifugal intent. Candidly, it is about bringing paying visitors to Notts and Derbyshire, and culture is the bait, as Stoker told us on opening day.

Glenn Ligon: Encounters and Collisions, the book as part of the show, maintains the sky-high standard of Nottingham Contemporary publications. Structured around Ligon's letters to artists, living and dead, whose works interact with Ligon's own in the show, it is an accessible and engaging adventure in high quality lithography. Farquharson has a real talent for such publishing, as revealed in *Aquatopia*, the blockbuster splash of summer 2013 (see *Spokesman* 122).

Tony Simpson

Glenn Ligon



Encounters and Collisions

ONE FOR ALL...

...AND ALL F*** GREECE!

