

## Reviews

### A Monk's Tale

**Ray Monk: *Bertrand Russell – The Ghost of Madness (1921-70)* Jonathan Cape, 574 pp. £25.00**

*'Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe'*

Professor Monk has locked himself for a long time into the Russell Archives at McMaster University. This self-imprisonment seems to have made him cross. His publishers tell us that the result is 'this magnificent biography', but a more truthful description would be that this is a hatchet job, the work of an axe man deft enough in chopping out matters of detail, but devoid of any vision which might redeem his labour with any kind of human charity.

Monk believes that Russell was haunted by the fear of madness, so that the second part of his life was dominated by the developing schizophrenia of his son John. John used to visit us at the Russell Foundation's offices in Nottingham, and it can safely be said that he was not very well. This appears to have been the view of those who manage the business affairs of the House of Lords, who seem to have gone to some trouble to dissuade John from continuing his interventions in their debates. These were not focused in a conventional manner, and might have been understood to bring discredit on their Lordships by distracting attention from their more serious allocutions.

But John was a friendly soul, greatly under the influence of his mother, who was a doughty campaigner, but hardly a dispassionate witness concerning the life and works of her first husband. There is no real evidence whatever that Russell was obsessive about his son's illness, although there is indeed some evidence that he understood it rather imperfectly. What would be good news for all of us would be counsel about how any of us might understand it better.

Monk clomps his way around the sensitive questions with relentless attention to everything about them that is trivial, especially if he thinks it can reflect discredit on his subject. He explores every available detail of Russell's second marriage, to Dora Black, celebrating all the events which led to their divorce, and he misses no opportunity to advertise the misfortunes of John and his family. These were great: but here they are retailed with no sympathy whatever, simply as items in Monk's indictment.

No-one will repair to Monk for evidence of the nobility of human character, but this book does persuasively show that when one is in a hole, it is sensible to stop digging. In the end, that is what Russell did, perhaps somewhat later than most people might have done if they had been in his situation. What is clear is that these fraught relationships were private matters while the parties were alive, and after their deaths become a public concern mainly among the prurient, and those who cater for their needs.

Much the same applies to Russell's third marriage, to Peter Spence, who is still alive, and has the right, one would think, to respect for her privacy. The marriage was not a happy one, and when it came to an end, it was followed by a fourth marriage, to Edith Finch. This was, indeed, a deeply fulfilling relationship, as Russell most movingly recorded in his Autobiography. The dedication, *To Edith*, is a poem which is printed in Russell's own handwriting.

In the end, Russell was lucky: very lucky indeed. Did he deserve such good fortune? Monk betrays no deep understanding of the moral constraints against which Russell, and indeed most of his generation, had to cope, so that he communicates none of the excitement about the new frontiers which Russell's advocacy helped to determine in the reaction against Victorian pieties and Edwardian hypocrisies. All that time in the Archive seems to have been devoted to the search for feet of clay, which continue to trace their steps through Monk's narrative even in areas which are far removed from personal or matrimonial affairs. Thus, he counterpoints his description of Russell's arguments against nuclear war with sticky footprints reminding us of his strained family relations.

'In the meantime, John remained part of the "rest" that Russell hoped to forget when he remembered his humanity.'

In a similar vein, he complicates the discussion of Russell's activities in the final years of his life by assuming that Russell saw Ralph Schoenman as a replacement for his son. Indeed, he often uncritically follows Ralph's account of events, which must be flattering to the younger man, but which will not give much confidence to those who are seeking to understand Russell's own development.

Monk presumes that, because it was small, the Russell Foundation was monolithic. Nothing could be further from the truth. There were quite serious disagreements on many policies, and Monk remains resolutely incurious about what these might have been. On the whole, he thinks, they were wicked, and that is enough said about them.

To give one example of these disputes, I thought that Russell's resignation from the Labour Party during the earlier years of the Vietnam war was a mistake. And I never made any secret of this view. Sometimes Russell teased me about my opinion, but at other times, he moved towards it. On one occasion, he actually applied for membership of the Transport and General Workers' Union, as a way of reintegrating himself in the debates which were taking place in the Labour movement. Jack Jones politely declined his application, on the grounds that the Union held no negotiating rights for philosophers.

Monk believes that the Russell Foundation was unanimous, after the death of Che Guevara, in supporting a call to arms to guerrilla warfare in South America. This is far from true. All of us had great respect for Che Guevara as he says, but some of us strongly believed that, while guerrilla warfare was entirely supportable in countries of brutal dictatorship, it was quite wrong in democratic countries, where the challenge was to develop means of public persuasion. Not only was the argument about defending political prisoners and prisoners of war

a very real and serious argument, but Russell himself agreed with it. He did not agree with any 'call to arms', and indeed he upheld my argument against Ralph Schoenman's on the last occasion that the three of us were together. Monk did not seek my account of these events, although he did more than once make appointments to see me which he subsequently cancelled.

Ralph Schoenman was no demiurge, or incubus. He concealed a very marked diffidence and sense of personal insecurity behind an overweening, even bombastic, front. He careened through a variety of political positions with no undue respect for consistency, until he finally alighted on a home-made hotchpotch of Trotskyism and anarchism.

Why had he been drawn to Russell in the first place? As a younger man, Russell had faced the First World War, and confronted all these doctrines at the time of their most raw expression. He had much to teach about them, but Ralph was not very open to instruction on such matters. What Ralph, as a young student, fresh from Princeton, would have found magnetic about Russell's example was only too clear. He was part of that generation which first came to grips with the threat of nuclear war.

In fact, it is quite impossible to read Russell's earlier anti-nuclear broadsides without being struck by their breadth and vision. However, Monk gives a cursory account of *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*, and offers but the briefest mention of *Has Man a Future?* Most of the attention devoted to this second work is given in a description of his granddaughter, Lucy's, first reading of the book.

In his chapter on disarmament in *Has Man a Future?*, Russell not only punctures part of Monk's argument, concerning the restricted significance of disarmament measures in the maintenance of peace. Far from decrying disarmament, which he insists 'is not alone sufficient', he deems it 'a very essential step without which no other can lead to much of value.' He goes on to define the essential novelty of modern weapons of mass destruction: This is 'the absolute certainty that, in a war, *both* sides will be defeated'. Much of this chapter, read today, is all-too-contemporary, on the eve of the inauguration of President Bush, who is about to introduce a magnified version of National Missile Defence, or 'Son of Star Wars', which reflects that 'cosmic impiety' which extends human quarrels into space.

The concluding words of this little book give us a picture of the immense gap between Russell and Monk. Russell weighs the achievements of our civilisation, and registers its uneven development.

'The Ptolemaic system of astronomy found its best poetic expression in Dante, and for this it had to wait some fifteen hundred years. We are suffering from undigested science. But in a world of more adventurous education this undigested mass would be assimilated and our poetry and art could be enlarged to embrace new worlds to be depicted in new epics. The liberation of the human spirit may be expected to lead to new splendours, new beauties, and new sublimities impossible in the cramped and fierce world of the past.'

You will not find this Russell in Monk's pages. 'No man is a hero to his valet' wrote Goethe. And perhaps too much time in the Archives dulls the imagination.

*Ken Coates*

### **Capitalism: A Monbiopsy**

**George Monbiot, *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, 430pp, £12.99**

George Monbiot has researched and recorded in overwhelming detail the takeover by big business of Britain's industries, farms, towns, roads, shops, hospitals, schools, universities, prisons, passports – you name it; he tells it.

But, as you read on, you realise that it is at the same time the takeover of a government, the Labour Government elected in 1997. This is the government that Prime Minister Blair promised a Labour Party conference, as Monbiot reminds us, 'would set the people free' by creating 'a model 20<sup>th</sup> century nation, based on ... the equal worth of all'. We were all to be 'stakeholders', but, as it transpired, some were to be more equal than others. In no time at all the Party was to be 'the Party of business', as Mr. Blair boasted, which aimed to establish 'the most business friendly environment in the world.' Monbiot reveals just what this has meant for our people, our towns, our land, our health and education as private capital has been invited in to take over our national wealth.

The Dome, whose exhibits celebrated with appropriate vulgarity the largest corporations operating in Britain, had as its simulacrum the 62 corporate stalls at the Labour Party conference in 1999. When asked by the BBC whether the exhibitors there were buying access to ministers, Monbiot records that 'Lord Whitty ... replied, "You don't buy access to ministers. You buy access to the whole party."' And so it appears; but it is the access to ministers, indeed, as Monbiot calls it, 'the corruption to which our political leaders have succumbed', for which he provides in this book the chapter and verse. What he does not emphasise is that, like the Dome, the whole exercise has been a disastrous failure. The take-over has been a take-away. The wealth that was taken over was spirited away. BMW, Ford, Vauxhall, Nissan, Sony, Biwater – where are they now? Not in the UK, or in much reduced shape.

We only hear of the big take-aways when whole plants are closed down, but the overall statistics are staggering. Capital, especially big capital, now moves quite freely from country to country and the balance of the movements in and out becomes important. In 1996 the balance of direct capital investment, comparing what moved out of the UK and what moved in, was £6 billion. Since then this figure has more than doubled year by year until just in the first half of the year 2000 it amounted to £110 billion. This net export of capital is a sum equal to the whole of the manufacturing and non-manufacturing fixed investment of non-

financial corporations in the UK estimated for the year 2000.

The response of the Government is to attract capital back by making it still easier for investors to do what they like with their money. Not content with subsidies and tax concessions, of which they have plenty – £530 million for British Aerospace; £200 million for Rolls Royce, and no net British corporation tax on Murdoch's billions – big business demands further reductions in what Stephen Byers, Labour's Secretary of State for Industry, calls 'unnecessary regulation.' Ministers David Clark and Nigel Griffiths were sacked in 1998 for refusing to water down the European Union's consumer protection directive. State regulation was to be replaced by self-regulation. Health and Safety Executive inspectors were reduced. Thereafter only 11% of major injuries were investigated and 10% only of these led to a prosecution, with a subsequent 20% leap in deaths and serious injuries in the workplace. Persistent enquirers to the Executive were warned off. This is quite contrary to the promises made when Labour came to power.

### **The Renegades**

The renegeing on promises made by Labour, as Monbiot records them, makes up a formidable list. He starts with a hilarious description of the struggle of the people of Skye against the tolls on the new bridge, owned mainly by the Bank of America, which Brian Wilson, in Opposition, called an 'immoral, unacceptable and unjust [action] of ruthless commercial interests ... which will not be meekly acquiesced in', but of which Brian Wilson, as Minister of Trade and Industry, told *Scotland on Sunday* 'It's just a lie to say either I or the Labour Party promised to abolish the tolls.' The developers everywhere have been given their way, building out-of-town shopping centres, where local planners recommended High Street renovation. Labour had promised 'an automatic right of appeal ... in cases where there has been a departure from the local plan'; but Planning Minister Nick Raynsford soon dropped that. The results in Southampton and in Brecon and elsewhere are relentlessly exposed by Monbiot, who persistently questions the role of Lord Sainsbury as a Minister of Trade and Industry.

One of the main means by which Big Business has moved into the space abandoned by government in the British state has been the Private Finance Initiative. Ostensibly, to reduce government spending to earlier limits set by the Conservatives, PFI has been the way in for private capital and private profit. All the warnings of Labour before the election disappeared. Harriet Harman, who warned that PFI would suck funds out of the NHS, making 'services to be driven by short term priorities', lost her job in the cabinet. Alastair Darling, who had warned that 'apparent savings now would be countered by formidable commitment on revenue expenditure in years to come', survived to implement the very policy that he had warned against.

Chris Smith, as shadow Health Secretary, raised 'serious questions' about the potential conflict of interest when the Tories appointed Robert Osborne, the head of Special Projects at Tarmac, the major builder of private hospitals, to be project

manager at the Department of Health. In January 1998 Osborne moved back to Tarmac with all the inside knowledge he had gained, but without a squeak of protest from the Government which proceeded in 2000 to privatise the PFI Taskforce. Jack Straw in 1996, as shadow Home Secretary, warned that it was 'morally unacceptable for the private sector to undertake the incarceration of those whom the state has decided need to be imprisoned'. Within a week of taking office, Monbiot records that Straw had decided to 'sign those contracts' for privately financed jails which were 'in the pipeline'; and by April 2000 'a total of five privately run prisons had opened, two were being built, and contracts for another two were being advertised.'

### **Education or Advertising?**

In education Monbiot reports a degree of infiltration of the private sector that is almost beyond belief. Schools have not only received funds for buildings through the private finance initiative, but they have been handed over, as in the United States, to private company management. This happened first in February 1999 in Guildford, Surrey, then in Hackney and Islington in London, and it is predicted that within five years 200 schools will be wholly managed by private companies. In the new Education Action Zones it is a requirement that business shall be involved. These zones cover clusters of schools where standards are lower than they should be and which apply to the government for special treatment. The businesses involved are Shell in Lambeth, British Aerospace in Hull, Plymouth and Teesside, Tesco in Hereford, ICI in Blackburn, McDonalds in Dudley, Teesside and North Somerset. They provide some extra funds or goods in kind, with matching funds from the government. In 1998 the government announced, we find from Monbiot, that these Education Action Zones 'are the test bed for the education system of the twenty-first century'.

God help us! But what is in it for these big businesses? They may hope one day to move in further to profitable school management as others have already done. In the mean time it is a PR exercise among the parents and they can discreetly advertise their wares among the children, who already know their names from watching television. Their exercise books can carry these names as donors; and teaching packs can be produced, as in the USA, which argue for tree felling and disposable nappies (Procter and Gamble), foods without high fat content (Kellogs), freedom of the press (Mobil), chocolate for wholesome energy (Cadburys). It seems that almost anything can be advertised by business these days, but in 1997, Monbiot reports, 'Christian Aid's television advert calling for an end to Third World debt was stopped because the organisation's objects are ... of a political nature.'

Big Business has moved even further into the universities, as Monbiot reveals. In its 1998 White Paper the Labour Government launched a 'reach-out fund' to encourage universities to work more closely with business.' The Higher Education Funding Council was redefined to 'ensure that higher education is responsive to the needs of business and industry'. But it was the students and

parents who were made to find the funds for this in the introduction of university fees, and not the business community from increased taxes. Yet business interest is not small. In 1999 the government funded a joint venture in Cambridge with industry to 'change the face of business and wealth creation in the UK.' Already, the University of Cambridge, as Monbiot cites examples, has a Shell Chair in Chemical Engineering, BP professorships in Organic Chemistry and Petroleum Science, an ICI Chair in Applied Thermodynamics, a Glaxo Chair of Molecular Parasitology, a Unilever Chair of Molecular Science, a Price Waterhouse Chair of Financial Accounting and a Marks and Spencers Chair of Farm Animal Health and Food Science. With what result? According to independent inquiries, which Monbiot quotes, 1000 research projects are being funded in British universities for oil and gas firms, and five times as much money was being spent on research into oil and gas as on research into renewable sources of energy.

#### **'Protecting Our Investors'**

And you may ask where are they investing? This review began with the warning that all this aid to industry by New Labour was not helping employment in Britain. More and more capital was flowing out of the country for investment overseas, and this has been particularly true in the case of the take-over of British companies. Faced with this untoward result the Government has been getting more and more desperate. In the week ending December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the British government faced defeat on two European Union directives. The first was a British attempt to block a European Union directive that would force companies to consult workers on redundancies and the sale of subsidiaries. The second was a British attempt to retain a European Union directive that would allow companies to proceed with take-over bids without consultation. The European Parliament had tabled amendments to this directive to guarantee employee consultation among other things. But British MEPS fought fiercely to retain what MEP Arlene McCarthy called 'our primary objective ... to protect our investors ... against hostile action or poison pills.'

Behind all the manoeuvring in the European Union Monbiot shows that a European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) has been working for 'faster privatisation and liberalisation and greater flexibility in working hours and wages'. Before he became a Labour Minister Lord Simon of Highbury, one-time chairman of BP, was Vice-Chairman of the ERT. But this is not where it ends. The single European market was seen by the ERT as a step towards a single trans-Atlantic market. In May 1997, according to Monbiot, just three weeks after taking office, Prime Minister Blair launched a proposal for advancing this plan, but the French rejected it as 'indecent' and 'absurd'. Within a year an almost identical scheme was agreed between the US President, the EU Commission President and Prime Minister Blair as the current President of the European Council, to establish a Trans-Atlantic Economic Partnership. Monbiot comments that 'it should not be entirely surprising to learn that among the early targets of [this body] are European laws restricting the use of bio-technology'. To push this

forward, Monbiot tells us, a Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue was established from one hundred chief executives of European and US companies, including Philips, ICI, Unilever, Siemens, Boeing, Ford, Procter & Gamble and Time Warner.

They scarcely need the World Trade Organisation, Monbiot suggests, to achieve their ends.

What conclusion can Monbiot reach at the end of this devastating exposé of corruption and intrigue in high places? It is not very encouraging.

‘There will be no messiah, no conquering hero to deliver us from the corporate leviathan. Most of our representatives have been either co-opted or crushed. Only one thing can reverse the corporate takeover of Britain. It’s you.’

Well, we have to try. Thank you for your help, George Monbiot!

*Michael Barratt Brown*

### **Forgetting Self-importance**

**Robert Taylor, *The TUC: From the General Strike to New Unionism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, £15.99**

We have long needed a substantial, authoritative, lucid and, yes, well written, history of the TUC. Despite all the outstanding masterpieces on the history of British trade unions from the Webbs, G.D.H. Cole, Hugh Clegg, Alan Fox, Francis Williams, Alan Flanders and the rest no one of substance has singled out the TUC for special historic study in recent times. The last important work was published by Ben Roberts, 42 years ago, which took the TUC story from 1868 – its foundation year – to 1921 when it was still working out of a match-box with a secretary and a few clerks. Indeed Roberts’ book takes us only up to the formation of the General Council in 1921, immediately after World War One, almost a pre-historic age in terms of industrial relations. Until now ... when we can acclaim a new and brilliant piece of scholarship by Robert Taylor, the Employment Editor of the *Financial Times*, the only remaining old-style industrial/labour correspondent of significance and talent now operating at national level in the media.

It is, of course, a formidable task to undertake a history of the TUC since we are talking about much of the political life of Britain during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But Taylor found a highly successful formula by concentrating his research on the general secretaries of the TUC from Walter Citrine through to John Monks and then injecting a handful of other outstanding trade union leaders – notably the chieftains of the Transport & General Workers’ Union, Bevin, Deakin, Cousins and Jack Jones – whose influence, collectively, in shaping the TUC and the indeed the entire culture of the trade union movement has been so profound.

Taylor's handling of his subject as he develops the narrative through the ideas and actions of these great trade union figures produces a classic study into the nature of British trade unionism – with all its blemishes, deficiencies and scars as well as its extraordinary achievements.

It is, of course, the oldest trade union movement in the world – a point that, if anything, makes it even more difficult to summarise within a single volume. Inevitably there are gaps in Robert Taylor's canvas. But that is not meant as a criticism so much as a reflection of how trade unionism has penetrated every vein of national political, social and economic life of Britain for nearly a century and a half. Indeed writing a modern history of the TUC is rather akin to drafting something similar on the Church with which, by the way, there are many parallels; like religion, trade union culture is woven into the tapestry of our national ethos.

Taylor lays down the foundation stone of his book with the accession of Walter Citrine, the electrician from Merseyside, to the TUC general secretaryship in October 1925, a few months before the General Strike of 1926. The TUC General Council was still in its infancy, having been designed and effectively created by Ernest Bevin in 1921 at the time Bevin was also creating his own TGWU. Taylor then uses Citrine, whom he greatly admires, to build up an account of how the TUC steered a shrewd, tactical path through the appalling minefields of the 'twenties, after the General Strike, and the devil's decade of the thirties. He also demonstrates something that is not generally recognised – Citrine's closeness to Ramsay MacDonald and how, in the interests of protecting the TUC, Citrine remained close to Ramsay even after the débâcle of 1931. My own feeling is that this section of the book underplays the importance of Bevin's role – since it was the TGWU leader, more than anyone else, who saved the Labour Party from virtual extinction after MacDonald's defection. Even in his account of the TUC's role in war-time Taylor appears to be more influenced by the significance of Citrine than of Bevin's crucial position as Minister of Labour in Churchill's War Cabinet where, as is now more fully understood, Bevin re-structured our entire workforce to man a national war machine equipped with powers even wider than those adopted in Hitler's Germany. It was Bevin, quite as much as Citrine, if not more so, who pressured Churchill into setting up the Beveridge Commission. Of course it was an exceptional partnership – yet the truth is that the two men profoundly disliked each other, not least because they knew each other possessed qualities the other would have liked. Taylor, clearly, is not attracted by Bevin's ruthless style yet he has to concede that 'there has never been anyone else like Bevin in the trade union movement'.

What I also salute about Robert Taylor's book is his analysis of George Woodcock. Taylor is not an admirer, unlike myself. Yet he concedes that Woodcock's period as general secretary was a watershed in the post-war history of the TUC. For Robert Taylor's taste George Woodcock was too cerebral; not enough of a man of action, unlike Victor Feather. Yet it was Woodcock who in 1962 tried to set the scene for the modernisation of the trade union movement: it

was Woodcock who foreshadowed Thatcherism by his frequent warnings to the unions that unless they put their own house in order and accepted broader social and economic responsibilities then the State, at some point, would do it for them; and still more that unless the unions faced up to the implications of wages and inflation in a modern society then they would ultimately have to face the prospect of a return to mass unemployment. Everything Woodcock predicted came true – long before anyone had heard the name Thatcher.

More than any other post-war trade union leader George Woodcock tried to spell out the nature of the conflict in society and its implications for trade unionism. A few listened and understood his message – but mostly, the unions continued to tread their well worn, and perfectly understandable, path to self-destruction. And it came close to that under Margaret Thatcher.

By far the most fascinating part of Robert Taylor's book deals with the period when the Wilson Government, with Barbara Castle as chief architect for trade union reform, tried to introduce *In Place of Strife* – her programme for legislative reform of industrial relations. It is brilliantly told with Taylor using hitherto unpublished extracts from Wilson's own notes on his negotiations with Victor Feather, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon. Taylor has delved deeply into the recently released official papers and has produced some gems. If anyone in the trade union movement still harbours doubts about the true origins of Thatcher's attempt to kill off the unions then they should read this section twice over. The brutal truth is that the trade unions overplayed their hand without recognising the political implications of what they were doing. It was a failure of leadership and a failure of political analysis for which we are still paying a high price under 'New' Labour.

In his final chapters Taylor selects the period of the Social Contract to illustrate the changing character of relations between Government and the TUC. He does this extremely well, using the role of Jack Jones, as well as Hugh Scanlon and Len Murray, to develop his case. It was another watershed period with Jack Jones emerging in what was probably the most influential role of any trade union leader in peace time. The Social Contract was essentially his creation but, as Robert Taylor quotes in an important extract from an article Jones wrote at the time for his union journal on the role of a trade union leader, Jones had his own deeper inner doubts reflected in this article:

'Anyone attempting to exercise dictatorial powers endangers the very spirit of trade unionism and indeed workers may require protection against officials who become too dictatorial. A general secretary, in my opinion, must be a guide and a teacher, helping to make policy but never seeking to become the master of the members. He must be a servant of the members in the collective sense whilst preserving the right to put an opinion and to offer guidance. The trade union leader worth his salt must, from the beginning, forget about his own importance and avoid pomposities at all cost.'

That is a mission statement which most leaders of any organisation – let alone trade unions – would find it hard to live up to. It is the eternal dilemma of

leadership. Even so Taylor writes that Jack Jones ‘was probably the most far sighted and imaginative of post-war trade union leaders’. I agree – up to a point. Every leader is a product and a reflection of his time and circumstances. In my view it was Woodcock who most effectively read into the crystal ball; he saw, and understood, the true nature of the conflict between the modern State and a trade unionism free to play with its own historic agenda. And it was the political instinct of Frank Cousins that dragged the Labour Movement onto a quite different plane of radicalism and did so much to politicise the trade union movement.

Taylor deals swiftly with the period of the TUC under both Len Murray and Norman Willis, skimming the miners’ strike in the process. He concludes on an optimistic note suggesting that the TUC, under the leadership of John Monks, now has a general secretary equipped, and destined, to revive the spirit and substance of trade unionism in its modern form. But Monks faces a serious and challenging task – to persuade a Blair Government, especially in its second term of office, that the trade unions have a crucial role in the battle to transform Britain into a more equal and socially just society as well as a modern economy.

*Geoffrey Goodman*

### **Spin-City – An Inside View**

**Andrew Rawnsley, *Servants of the People – The Inside Story of New Labour*, Hamish Hamilton, £17.50**

This is a book critical of the style of the present New Labour government, but it is not written from the standpoint of the traditional left of the labour movement. What has really upset the author – Andrew Rawnsley, associate editor and political columnist of the *The Observer* – is that it is a government with very little substance, and that it has substituted ‘spin’ for content. New Labour, the author observes, has ‘not yet acquired a reliable compass’. He suggests that to govern by the fickle gusts of the press is like trying to steer a boat with the sail rather than the tiller.

For all his criticisms, Rawnsley’s assessment of the record of Tony Blair’s Government is not hostile. Indeed, his objection to its style – the all pervading use of ‘spin’, the rejection of collective decision-making through the Cabinet, the contempt for the traditions of the Labour Party and the crude attempts to control all and sundry – is that it obscures what he describes as the government’s quite considerable success.

Here, it seems to me, is one of the weaknesses of Rawnsley’s assessment. Tony Blair does have an objective. It is to prove that New Labour is different from traditional Labour, in that it is committed to capitalism, usually described

as the 'market system', that it regards the unions as no more relevant for Labour than other different pressure groups, that legislation affecting trade unions should be mildly modified, but should remain restrictive, that there should be no radical assault on the inequalities that disfigure British society, and that Britain's international policy should give priority to NATO and not to the UN. Britain should see itself as the most faithful (in effect, the most servile) ally of the USA.

The resort to 'spin' is not because New Labour has no compass, but because it is trying to do what in the ultimate will prove impossible, namely to convince its supporters that it is fulfilling traditional Labour objectives, whilst simultaneously seeking to persuade the press barons and business interests that it has very different objectives. This is the destructive flaw in the philosophy of New Labour.

What then are, in the author's view, the successes of New Labour? First, that the government has 'passed the basic competency test of governing by not doing anything spectacularly ruinous to the country'. The disposable income of most Britons has risen, unemployment has fallen, inflation is low, more resources have been allocated to public services, a statutory minimum wage has been introduced, the social chapter has been adopted, there has been some redistribution in favour of the poorest working families, and New Labour's five pledges (on the circulated pledge card) are likely to be fulfilled. Rawnsley also writes favourably of the government's record in Northern Ireland and in Kosovo.

Nevertheless, the main impression left by this book is not complimentary to New Labour. Most of its pages are critical, and some passages are contemptuous of the small group who, in the author's words, were 'less a mass movement, more a junta who executed a *coup*' and who were the founders of New Labour. They were what Harold Wilson once called, in a different context, 'a tightly knit group of politically motivated men'.

This junta consisted primarily of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Peter Mandelson and Alistair Campbell. Their project was to secure the leadership of the Labour Party for a very different set of policies from those hitherto proclaimed, and, certainly in the case of Tony Blair, to prepare the way for a merging of two different traditions – the socialist and the liberal – with a view to establishing a dominant position for a centre-left merged party in a capitalist Britain throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The project rested on the assumptions that the British labour movement could be persuaded to sever its commitment to socialism and that the influence of the unions within the Labour Party could be diminished. In other words, the Labour Party would support capitalism, but would seek to influence its conduct in order to mitigate its worst evils. It is a point of view similar not only to liberal reformers, but also to some conservatives in the 'one nation' tradition.

The claim of the Blairites to have inherited the social democratic tradition in Britain, as distinct from what remains of the brief history of the SDP, is one that cannot be sustained. In the struggle for the formation of the Labour Party, and in the early years of the Party, the socialists were often opposed by a number of

union leaders whose political ambitions rarely went beyond the limits of the Liberal Party. From the end of the First World War, however, until comparatively recently, the Labour Party, whatever its periodic failings, remained committed to a socialist objective. The need for this commitment was clearly explained, for example, in Clement Atlee's book, *The Labour Party in Perspective*.

There are, of course, particular issues on which socialists and liberals can co-operate, and there are some circumstances in which it is justifiable to confront reaction with a centre-left coalition. But a merging of the two traditions within one political party is a different matter. It could take place only by rejecting or accepting a commitment to the objective of socialism. One or the other would surrender a fundamental tenet of its outlook. In the case of the Blairites their project rests on the rejection of socialism.

Talk of a 'third way' in politics reveals no more than a shallowness of thought. Rawnsley quotes the liberal academic, Ralf Dahrendorf, who described it as the avoidance of hard choices by 'trying to please everyone'. Roy Hattersley, a supporter of traditional Labour, but not normally thought of as on the left of the labour movement, deplored 'the idea of producing an appeal which is so amorphous that it can embrace virtually everyone'.

Tony Blair won the last general election with a large majority because of the revulsion towards the Tories felt by so many of the electorate. The change, admittedly, was much exaggerated by the first past the post voting system, and it is well to recall that there was a low turnout. Fewer than one in three of those entitled to vote put a cross against the name of a Labour candidate. Labour's huge majority in 1997 was secured with fewer votes than had been given to the Tories in the 1992 election. Rawnsley rightly comments that the Sun newspaper switched to New Labour only when it was clear that the Party was 'motoring into office'.

Although Rawnsley describes as a success the *coup* of Tony Blair and his group in changing Labour to New Labour he does not describe, and even less does he analyse, how it took place. This is a weakness of the book. Hence the sub-title – 'The Inside Story of New Labour' – is not justified. Rawnsley describes how the leaders of New Labour behave, but not how they secured acceptance if not outright support from a majority of unions, and how they managed to bring so many constituency parties into line. The least difficult part of the project was to win support from a majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The story of the ascendancy of New Labour has yet to be unfolded in full.

The origins of New Labour cannot be attributed solely to Tony Blair and the narrow circle around him. They are to be found in the foundation, breakaway and influence of the SDP, in the scale of the defeat in the 1983 general election, and in the disillusioning experience of the period of Neil Kinnock's leadership. Neil Kinnock was elected on what most members of the Party assumed was his leftish orientation. Their expectations were not fulfilled. The defeat of the miners in the dispute of the mid-1980s encouraged the Tories in their legislative drive against trade unionism and discouraged and deterred trade union organisation, activity

and ambition far beyond the mining industry.

If John Smith had lived the outcome would, almost certainly, have been different. He was not from the left of the movement but he had a respect for its traditions and, like Roy Hattersley, had strong convictions about the need for greater equality and redistribution. In my view he would have led Labour to victory in a general election, and his government would have been recognisably Labour.

Despite the narrowness of the junta who succeeded in changing Labour into New Labour, Rawnsley reveals and describes in great detail their personal rivalries. I found it uncomfortable reading. There was, and presumably still is, the rivalry between Blair and Brown and the animosity between Mandelson and a number of his colleagues. There is the role of Alistair Campbell, and the influence of others who formed part of a network of intrigue and counter-intrigue. All this amounts to more than the inevitable creative tension between colleagues.

There is the embarrassing account, according to Rawnsley, of the ending of Robin Cook's marriage, and the subordination of a relationship to the perceived political needs of the moment. Even more damaging is the story of plot and manoeuvre in the failed attempt to impose a leader on the Welsh Labour Party. The list of people from big business who have been given jobs in and around the government is also recounted at some length.

Andrew Rawnsley recalls that in July 1998, Tony Blair spoke enthusiastically of the Dome: 'so bold, so beautiful, so imposing ...' etc. In reality what it embodies, he says, 'was the sterility of spin'. What people wanted was not a vacuous temple of political vanity, but a health service that worked.

'Spin' is a characteristic of New Labour. The number of Whitehall press officers, Rawnsley says, has expanded to 1,000. Incredible! What do they all do? Among other duties they circulate material and answer enquiries in support of government policies which are very different from the expectations of millions who voted Labour.

'Spin, as a substitute for content betrays contempt for the public. It may succeed for a time: ultimately it fails'. What, however, is to be said for contempt of collective decision-taking? According to Rawnsley, 'Blair was openly contemptuous of the idea that the Cabinet was an appropriate forum in which to make decisions'. He provides evidence to sustain his contention.

Rawnsley praises Blair for his role over Kosovo. He writes: 'While other Western leaders spoke with weaselly equivocation, Blair clearly articulated the ethical basis for NATO's action, and was least flinching in pressing it to victory.' I disagree that this is cause for praise. The bombing of Yugoslavia was not in support of a United Nations decision. It was a unilateral act by NATO in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations. It was the culmination of a policy designed to tear up Yugoslavia and to make the newly founded states safe for the transition to capitalism.

This is a readable book. It exposes many of the ways in which the shallowness of New Labour shows itself. On the other hand, it is not an analytical work. At

times it descends into gossip. It does not provide anywhere near an adequate account of the circumstances and means whereby the Blairites secured their influential role in the labour movement.

*J. E. Mortimer*

### Secrets of the Confessional

**Peter Kilfoyle, *Left Behind*, Politicos, 327 pp, £17.99**

**Julia Langdon, *Mo Mowlam*, Little, Brown and Company, 324 pp, £16.99**

Political memoirs spawn as politics declines. Just when the neo-liberal consensus has blanketed all the opinion forming media, and annulled intelligent discussion about nearly everything, there is a rush to the publishers, who seem to be able to sell all the tittle-tattle of the decade, however unpromising it may seem.

These latest contributions come from different parts of the emerging spectrum, however. Peter Kilfoyle was a Junior Minister who honourably resigned as the realisation dawned upon him that New Labour was not effectively representing his constituents in Walton. Indeed, it could be argued that New Labour was punishing those constituents inordinately, because of their distance from Middle England, and their regrettable tendency to be poor. Mo Mowlam's memoir, by contrast, has a completely different provenance. She appears to have no discernible conscience, but is apparently quite angry because her talents have not been adequately recognised. Therefore Julia Langdon has been engaged to produce a celebration of her life, which is summarised (in a caption to a youthful portrait) as that of 'an effective politician, a charismatic personality – the definitive biography of Mo Mowlam'.

It must be said that Mowlam does not emerge very well from this definitive account of her charisma, because her private life is celebrated in somewhat more detail than is necessary to explain her political evolution, from idealistic nuclear disarmament to raddled cynic. Langdon spares us no details and we begin to feel sorry for her subject, who is denied that protective cover of decent privacy to which even her political opponents might think she was entitled.

There is a potentially interesting story hidden within this book, if the grime can be scraped away. Langdon reports the generation of a widespread rumour, as Mowlam began her ascent up the political greasy pole: 'We think she is a spy, working for British Intelligence'. Even more widespread was the rumour that she was working for the Central Intelligence Agency. Langdon sees these rumours as evidence of how awful the politics of the early 'eighties were.

It is unlikely that we shall obtain hard evidence either way about Mowlam's affinities with James Bond. They are not likely to be terribly interesting in themselves. But Langdon is less than curious about a different association which has some element of reality attached to it. This concerns Mowlam's relations with the British American Project for the Successor Generation, the Transatlantic

network which was launched in 1985 with funding from the United States.

In 1983 President Reagan addressed a meeting in the White House about the implications of the rising peace movement in Europe. Present were Rupert Murdoch and Sir James Goldsmith, among many other opinion formers of the right, including a personal representative of Axel Springer, and Ambassador Dailey. This was Reagan's brief:

'We need ... to cement relations among the various sectors of our societies in the United States and Europe. A special concern will be the successor generations, as these younger people are the ones who will have to work together in the future on defence and security issues.'

The British American Project followed two years later, bringing together twenty-four Americans and twenty-four Britons aged between 28 and 40. All were high flyers, and most were in politics or journalism. Their meetings were funded by a variety of donors, and sponsored by a profusion of institutions based on either side of the Atlantic.

The choice of who would participate on the British side apparently reflected the advice of George Robertson, another one-time nuclear disarmer who now presides over the affairs of Nato. He was aided by David Lipsey. There were a clutch of Social Democrats, headed by Sue Slipman and Penny Cooper, both of whom found the Third Way from the Communist Party when Roy Jenkins pushed out his boat at the beginning of the 1980s. From the Labour Party went Chris Smith and Mo Mowlam, who signed up in 1988, when she joined the British American Project meeting in St. Louis, along with Peter Mandelson.

All this information and a great deal more was already in the public domain before the Langdon book was composed, and it is very much more useful in explaining Mowlam's charisma than are vague stories about her connections (or otherwise) with Intelligence Services. The British American Project was a political project, intimately associated with the task of weaning the Labour Party from commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament. That the core of the New Labour team is riddled with Intelligence operatives of various kinds is unfortunately quite likely: but when it comes to making political choices, these people may not follow a consistent political trajectory. However, the platform of the British American Project is a consistent political line, and that has informed the Blair project from the first day and continues to do so. It is rather more informative about the Mowlam story than her 'touchy-feely' style, which might easily coexist with more ruthless instincts.

Peter Kilfoyle never flirted with European Nuclear Disarmament, but fought his way through the difficult training ground of Liverpool local politics. By the time that he became a full-time official in the Labour Party, the Militant tendency was going from strength to strength in Liverpool, and a large part of his book is given over to his version of the conflict between Militant and official Labour. By the time that Mowlam's story had brought her into Parliament, Kilfoyle was trying to maintain a space for official Labour in the polarisation which had driven

its wedge between the Militant on the one side, and the Social Democratic Party/Liberal Alliance on the other.

These were days of feverish activity, the flavour of which Kilfoyle captures very well. But it would be difficult to discern any pattern of ideas which could help the contenders to rise above the internecine battles in which they were engaged. At the end of the process, the Militants found themselves outside the Labour Party, and began a slow learning curve about the need to establish alliances and co-operate with others in order to regain some political space. Peter Kilfoyle won, and followed Eric Heffer into Parliament. But his other enemies, the Social Democrats, had taken over the Parliamentary Party, so that his last state was as bad as his first. Kilfoyle's book is an interesting source, because he has been a front line witness to the processes which have broken the Labour Party into neo-liberalism.

We still need a space in which those who are committed to social justice may associate, and this space still needs to constrain both dogmatism and opportunism. The processes which advanced Mowlam seem to be spitting her out. The massive confusion through which Kilfoyle found his way to Parliament has left him with sufficient integrity to recognise that none of his objectives are being realised through the machinery he has inherited. No doubt the shelves of books tracing lost hopes will become even longer before we shall be able to answer Kilfoyle's final question.

*James Gordon*

### Scholar or Spinner?

**Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way and its Critics*, Polity Press 2000, £7.99**

This book, a sequel to Giddens 1998 (which has been translated into twenty-five languages), is a defence of 'third way politics' against its critics. Although New Labour in Britain is the primary point of reference, 'third way politics' is understood more broadly to include Clinton's 'New Democracy' as well as changes in the politics of social democratic parties in other European countries.

The 'third way' is according to Giddens an 'alternative political philosophy' to neo-liberalism, not (as critics have claimed) a form of it. It is 'above all an endeavour to respond to change' – to pursue left values (and centrally the value of social justice) in the context of 'the advent of new global markets and the knowledge economy', avoiding both the 'bureaucratic, top-down government favoured by the old left and the aspiration of the right to dismantle government altogether'. In contrast with neo-liberals, it addresses 'social problems produced by deregulated markets' in the name of social justice. Its cornerstones are 'equal opportunity, personal responsibility and the mobilisation of citizens and communities'. It shifts the emphasis from 'the redistribution of wealth to promoting wealth creation' – 'we have to find ways of taking care of ourselves'.

Government 'should foster conditions that lead firms to innovate and workers to become more efficient in the global economy'. In a conscious attempt to address 'what are seen as prime concerns of ordinary citizens', it gives particular attention to family life, crime and community decay.

It rejects the traditional social democratic aim of 'equality of outcome' in favour of 'equality of opportunity'. The former objective led to 'effort and responsibility' being ignored, 'dull conformity', 'public spending almost regardless of what was actually achieved', a detrimental impact of taxation on competitiveness and job creation. Benefits 'too often subdued enterprise as well community spirit. Rights were elevated above responsibilities, resulting in a decline in mutual obligation and support'.

Giddens summarises 'third way' politics under six heads. First, there are many issues and problems that the left-right opposition fails to illuminate – hence the attention to the political centre. Second, the three key areas of power – government, the economy and civil society – 'all need to be constrained in the interests of social solidarity and social justice'. Third, there is a new social contract: 'no rights without responsibilities', which applies to politicians as well as citizens, rich as well as poor, business as well as individuals. Fourth, it 'seeks to reconcile economic growth mechanisms with structural reform of the welfare state'. 'Investment' in 'human capital' becomes a central focus. Fifth, it aims at 'equality of opportunity' rather than 'equality of outcome'. Sixth, it 'takes globalisation seriously', aiming to maximise its benefits, while looking to transform existing global institutions.

Criticisms of 'third way politics' will be familiar to readers of this journal, and I shall not use this review to repeat them. Giddens himself summarises criticisms under six heads: (a) it is an amorphous political project, defined by what it isn't but not what it is; (b) it is simply a move to the right, for instance in its preoccupation with 'middle England', and its conservative policies on the family and crime; (c) it accepts neo-liberalism, takes globalization as a given, rejects redistribution, and adopts the neo-liberal aim of reducing state power; (d) it is essentially an Anglo-American project, irrelevant for instance to countries with more deeply entrenched welfare systems; (e) though it inclines to neo-liberalism, it has no distinctive economic policy of its own, unlike traditional social democracy; (f) it has no effective way of coping with ecological issues.

Instead of elaborating criticisms of 'third way politics', I want to focus on the question of what this book is, what it is doing, and how we should regard it. Giddens is both an eminent sociologist and a 'guru' (according the blurb) of 'third way' politics. The ambivalence of his position is evident in the ambivalence of the book. He refers to it in the conclusion as an 'analysis'. Yet much of it is a polemic on behalf of and in defence of the 'third way'. But, to complicate matters further, the polemic is sometimes in defence of the actuality of 'third way' politics (especially the politics of New Labour), and sometimes in favour of policies which would substantially change, for instance, the actual 'third way' politics of New Labour in Britain. Giddens is not just an apologist for

the third way, he sees in it hitherto unrealised possibilities which his analysis/polemic seems designed to encourage.

I want to look at the question of what this book is in terms of its language, its 'discourse'. Social sciences such as Sociology have their own specialist academic discourses for representing areas of social life such as politics. Such areas of social life also have their own specialist discourses – political discourses in this case. When social scientists theorise and analyse areas of social life, one might see part of what they are doing from this perspective as setting up a dialogue between their own theoretical discourses and the practical discourses (which of course incorporate their own theorising) of social life. One view of this dialogue is as a process of translation of the latter into the former (which does not preclude the former being partly reshaped by the latter), with the proviso that such 'translations' may contribute to transforming the area of social life analysed.

But what happens when social scientists write for general readerships, and become participants in the practical domains which they theorise and analyse – as I have recently done myself (Fairclough 2000)?

One consequence is that the relationship between academic discourses and practical discourses, always more problematic in any case than my simple sketch in the previous paragraph suggests, may become acutely problematic. I believe this is the case with Giddens' book. To put the point sharply, his claims to be doing analysis are made problematic by too much use of the political discourse of the 'third way' within his own analytical discourse – he is largely writing from within the political discourse of the 'third way', so to speak, rather than treating that political discourse as part of what calls for analysis (if not critique). Giddens has been referred to as the sociologist of the 'third way'. But can that description be justified if he is writing as a 'third-wayer' himself?

An example is the phrase 'investment in human capital', for instance: 'In the new information economy, human (and social) capital becomes central to economic success. The cultivation of these forms of capital demands extensive social investment ..' (page 52). This is an economic and managerial discourse which has been taken into political discourse by New Labour, and seamlessly passes into the discourse of analysis in Giddens' book. Such a discourse is not merely a way of representing people, it has become 'operationalised' in ways of treating people (for instance, ways of 'educating' them), and aspires at least to being 'inculcated' as ways of being, ways in which people see themselves. It can be seen as part of the new 'enclosure' of restructuring capitalism, the enclosure of consciousness (Saul 1992, Graham 2000). Part of an incursion of capital which is dangerously reductive of people's humanity. One might think that social scientists, far from uncritically taking this discourse over into their discourse of analysis, should analyse it: its emergence in economic discourse, how it has come to be part of the dominant economic discourse, how it has been appropriated in political discourse, how it may contribute to the neo-liberal political project of removing obstacles to capitalist restructuring (Bourdieu 1998) in legitimising (often in articulation with an apparently humanist discourse, eg

'people are our greatest asset') the new 'enclosure'. In uncritically appropriating rather than analysing this discourse, Giddens' text might be seen as contributing to this legitimisation, and we might reasonably see this fudging of analysis and apologia as ideological. (There is an interesting instance late in the book where 'invested in' appears in scare-quotes: 'those outside the labour market ... should be 'invested in' just as much as others', which one might take as indicative of an uncomfortable oscillation between analysis and apologia.)

Here is another example, from amongst many: 'Even in its most developed forms, the welfare state was never an unalloyed good. All welfare states create problems of dependency, moral hazard, bureaucracy, interest-group formation and fraud' (page 33). The list in the second sentence brings together social scientific discourse (eg 'interest-group formation') and the political discourse of the 'third way' ('dependency' and 'fraud'). 'Dependency' comes from New Right political discourse, it is tied to theories of an 'underclass', and it construes welfare as having damaging moral and psychological effects on claimants (Levitas 1998). It has been taken over in the political discourse of the 'third way', and Giddens is using it uncritically within his analytical discourse. There certainly is room for social scientific analysis of negative effects of past forms of welfare provision, but again the practical discourses of politics should be part of what is analysed rather than slipping unannounced into the analytical discourse. Similarly with 'fraud' – the analyst might note for instance that 'welfare fraud' is a far more salient part of 'third way' discourse than 'corporate fraud' (eg tax-evasion), even though the scale of the latter is arguably far greater than the scale of the former.

Giddens' self-insertion into the discourse of the third way is more than a matter of vocabulary. It also includes narratives of change, for example:

The advent of new global markets and the knowledge economy, coupled with the ending of the Cold War, have affected the capability of national governments to manage economic life and provide an ever-expanding range of social benefits. We need to introduce a different framework . . .

Compare this with the following extract from Tony Blair's Foreword to the 1998 DTI White Paper on Competitiveness:

The modern world is swept by change. New technologies emerge constantly, new markets are opening up. There are new competitors but also great new opportunities.

Our success depends on how well we exploit our most valuable assets: our knowledge, skills and creativity. These are the key to designing high-value goods and services and advanced business practices. They are at the heart of a modern, knowledge driven economy.

Amongst the characteristics of the narratives of global economic change which are pervasive within and beyond contemporary politics, let me just mention three which are illustrated in both these examples. First, human social agency and responsibility for change are elided: what actions on the part of what social

agents (governments, business corporations) have facilitated and extended 'new global markets', 'new technologies' and so forth? Abstract nominalisations of processes such as 'advent', and intransitive verbs such as 'emerge' obfuscate agency. Second, these narratives characteristically incorporate lists of changes, which arguably have more of a rhetorical than an analytical function in establishing the inexorable and unquestionable fact of change (Clarke & Newman 1998), and which incorporate a logic of appearances rather than a logic of causes – disconnected evidences of change. One might wonder in this regard why 'the ending of the Cold War' figures in Giddens' (short) list. Third, these narratives are structured as 'is/must' narratives: 'these are the unquestionable facts about change, this is what we must therefore do'. The 'global economy' is represented as an inevitable and unchangeable fact which constitutes the horizon within which we must act.

The ambivalence between defending actual 'third way' politics and pushing it in new directions also shows up in the language, though in this case at a rather different level: the slippage throughout the book between 'is' and 'ought'. For example, 'the third way ... proposes to construct a new social contract, based on the theorem 'no rights without responsibilities' (which) has to apply to politicians as well as citizens, to the rich as well as the poor, to business corporations as well as private individuals. Left-of-centre governments should be prepared to act upon it in all these areas', including 'taking on' the big corporations where necessary. New Labour in Britain does indeed propose to construct and is attempting to construct this new social contract, but its application to welfare claimants is considerably more obvious than its application to the rich and business corporations. Similarly, the third way is said to be committed to building a 'strong civil society', a claim which strikes me as at odds with New Labour's infamous attachment to 'media spin', to managing perception and promoting itself and its policies rather than seeking real political dialogue. Giddens gives little attention to 'media spin', which perhaps means that he sees this way of doing politics as an accidental feature of New Labour rather than an inherent part of 'third way' politics. I am not so sure.

It is a reasonable objective for analysis to show gaps between a political discourse and its operationalisation in policies, and hence point to hitherto unrealised possibilities. But there are two caveats. First, it would seem important to clearly separate out actual policies from what are judged to be possible policies, and I don't think Giddens does that. Secondly, it would also seem to be important to be alert to the possibility that the self-representation of values and aims and policies in a political discourse may be partly obfuscatory, legitimising rhetoric which has little to do with policy intentions. I don't think Giddens is.

Summing up, looking at the language of Giddens' book is a way into seeing the ambivalence which is part of what makes the book problematic: is this the analysis of a prominent social scientist, or the advocacy of an enthusiastic 'third-wayer'?

*Norman Fairclough*

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## Russia's Blackest Belt

### ***First Person, Vladimir Putin, Hutchinson, London, 2000***

'Our state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people'. Writing while he was Boris Yeltsin's Prime Minister, Russia's President added that a restored 'law-based' state was a 'source of order and main driving force for change'. Elected in June 2000, Vladimir Putin has appeared to be the providential Strong Man to head such a nation. Putin pursued the war in Chechnya – leaving a legacy of continued repression – to dig in the borders. That the armed forces were a key constituency behind his candidature was no surprise. To others, weary of his predecessor's erratic behaviour and the dominance of uncontrolled oligarchs, Putin's emphasis on a stable legal framework offers protection from Mafia capitalism. It might be conjectured that the former Soviet Union is emerging from the disaster of Western sponsored Shock Therapy and seeking a new path. For some Western critics of homogeneous global economic liberalisation, Putin's programme, despite (or because of?) its authoritarian inflections, has offered the glimmerings of an autonomous developmental strategy.

*First Person* is a collection of interviews with the leader of the Russian Federation. Contributions from Putin's wife, Lyudmila, and other figures in his life, teachers, friends and colleagues, help to give a rounded portrait. The book is free of Boris Yeltsin's bombast and bloated self-importance, in *Against the Grain* (1990). It reveals a 'hooligan' youth, successful sporting (judo) achievements, an academic background in law, and entry into a mediocre career in the KGB counter-intelligence service. The recollections come alive when Putin was confronted with the disintegration of the Eastern bloc. Stationed in East Germany, which he describes as 'harshly totalitarian', the KGB operative observed at first hand that, rather than sanction repression, 'Moscow is silent'. It had, in fact, 'a terminal disease without a cure – a paralysis of power'. (page 79)

It is not the details of Putin's subsequent career in Leningrad politics and his rise to the Kremlin which grabs the attention. It is the thread connecting this 'paralysis' with Russia's central concerns. The aftermath of the war in Yugoslavia, NATO's expansion, and resistance to any internationalisation of conflicts (such as Chechnya) loom large. Fear of a Chechean effect on the Caucasus and other regions leads Putin to declare that they faced 'disintegration' of the country which 'would have been a global catastrophe' (page 142). Declaring, in neo-Stalinist fashion, the rebels to be 'bandits' obscures the real stakes. The actions of NATO in Kosovo, contradicting the UN Charter, and in 'violation of the founding principles of international law' are reasons for Putin to stay at arm's length from greater co-operation with the Western military alliance. He states, 'Russia is a country of European culture – not NATO culture' (page 178). Indeed, the post-Kosovo Russian Military doctrine is opposed to the West. With weakened conventional forces it reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in cases of large-scale aggression involving conventional forces. There is an attempt to retain an ultimate state sovereignty through the international nuclear threat.

How far is the Russian state truly sovereign? It is weak, both internally and internationally. A halving of the GDP during the 1990s, IMF control through aid, giant cartels amid economic disorganisation and corruption, regional political boss culture, have enfeebled its tax base and lines of command. Outside, the increasing encroachments of the USA and NATO, now standing over Eastern Europe and much of the former Soviet Union, the growth of Western oil interests around the Caspian Sea, to an American presence in the sensitive republic of Azerbaijan, further weaken the foundations of a statist project. Putin's centralising remedies in the field of international relations introduce an alarming new dimension of nuclear instability. His core national platform, disguised beneath appeals to Russia's 'greatness' and a strong legal apparatus, remains neo-liberal. It is directed against the welfare state. Boris Kagarlitsky has written that remaining social welfare measures (low rents, subsidised transport, utilities, health care, pensions) are the glue that sticks an otherwise splintered Russian society together... Putin, amongst calls for firm (private) property rights, effective courts, announces that 'We will have to review all the social guarantees that the state has taken upon itself in recent years...' (page 179). Far from following the architect of the German post-war 'social market', Ludwig Erhard, whom he admires, Putin appears about to remove the few progressive structures of Official Communism.

After the sinking of the nuclear submarine *Kursk*, the widespread popular disenchantment with the regime that followed indicates that there remains a vast gulf between the statist aspirations and rusty realities. In these insecure conditions the Western liberal left's prospect of 'cosmopolitan democracy' with multiple sovereign allegiances and identities has made little headway. In a very different tradition, Putin at times echoes Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), as a ruler consolidating a powerful state. However, behind today's Boyars are millions of working people and unemployed living in poverty. Little is offered

for them. While human rights, social protection and democracy are proclaimed, geopolitics and an entrenched state apparatus are at the heart of Putin's world-view. A solution to ethnic conflict in ruthless suppression is a malign precedent for the deployment of Russia's nuclear arsenal. Conditions in the Caucasus, and the ex-Soviet republic's further East, will test this vision still harder.

*Andrew Coates*

### Chinese Puzzle

**Jin Qiu, *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution*, Stanford University Press, 278pp.**

**Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao*, Hurst and Company, 251pp, £25**

For Western observers, Lin Biao went up like a rocket, and came down like the stick. In the China of his times, of course, Lin was a brilliant and courageous General, high in the affections of Mao himself, but also very widely popular. But to foreigners it was a great surprise when, at the beginning of the cultural revolution, in 1966, Lin Biao, apparently out of the blue, was officially designated as Mao's successor. Yet only five years later, his plane fell out of the sky in mysterious circumstances, and he was denounced from every platform as a fallen careerist and perfidious traitor.

Belatedly, scholars are trying to turn up the evidence about this still mysterious story. The crash had taken place on the evening of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1971. But it was not announced until the summer of the following year, when it was claimed that Lin had been developing plans for a *coup d'état* to displace and murder Mao Tse-Tung. This story was not widely believed outside China, because Lin had a considerable reputation for audacious leadership during the civil war, and was perceived as a die-hard supporter of the Chinese regime.

Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun begin the re-examination of the Chinese official view in their study of 1996. They argue that Lin was not an ambitious man, but was essentially uninterested in power or even politics. He had been thrust into a leadership role by Mao, presumably to cement the loyalty of the army during the profound turbulence of the cultural revolution. Lin had never opposed Mao politically, but he was far from a zealous proponent of the cultural revolution.

Now a new book by Jin Qiu throws a powerful light on these issues. She writes from inside knowledge, because her father, General Wu, was Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese Airforce under Marshall Lin, and was cited as an accomplice in the alleged abortive *coup*. Of course, Jin suffered, with all her family, who were first placed under house arrest for seven years, and then assigned to forced labour. But by 1989 she was able to travel to the United States

to study, and tried to focus her memories in the light of her studies. This book has developed from her doctoral dissertation, but it really does help to explain the mental environment of the Chinese leadership during those days.

Ms. Jin rehearses all the known facts about the downfall of Liu Shaoqi, Lin's predecessor in the dangerous role of announced successor to Chairman Mao. Liu was designated principal exponent of the Capitalist Road, and his ending was apparently quite terrible. But the cultural revolution would have become a civil war if the army had not been brought to support it, and this is presumably the main explanation for Lin's promotion.

But according to this book, Lin was almost permanently disabled, quite probably by manic depression. This was diagnosed by a Soviet doctor in the fifties, but rejected by Lin's Chinese specialist. However, subsequent diagnoses seem to have upheld the original Russian view.

'Lin became seriously ill whenever he perspired and had phobias about water, wind and cold. He was even said to be nervous at the sight of the rivers and oceans in traditional Chinese paintings, and got diarrhoea at the sight of water'.

Far from manoeuvring for power and influence, he was obsessional about escaping from the incessant demands that were made upon him in his new role.

But conspiracy for power and influence were by no means absent from the Court of Mao Tse-Tung, and this book offers some insights into the state of mind of some of the more notorious conspirators.

Nobody could stand up to Mao Tse-Tung, whose prestige was overpowering. All the structures which had sought to check him were challenged in the cultural revolution, so that the public power became ever more capricious. Zhou Enlai emerges as a severely rational and responsible person at the centre of affairs; but it is evident that all his powers must have been tested to the extreme in the fevered atmosphere which was developing all round him. Small wonder that a sick and stressed invalid lost his grip during all these public convulsions.

Why then did Lin find himself in a plane, crossing Mongolia, that September? Neither of these books can pretend to give a satisfactory explanation. The archives which might allow us to understand are unlikely to be opened very quickly.

So the mystery continues. But concern about the mechanics of Lin's death should not obscure the bigger mystery: for Lin had been a lion among the Generals of the People's Liberation Army, whose courage and audacity were legendary. A lesser man would have been quite unable to attach the army to the endorsement of the project for the cultural revolution.

The detailed account of the divergent reactions of Lin's family members to the gathering crisis in the Chinese leadership tells us something significant. But we still need to know why this hero of the revolution contributed to his own destruction. There will be more books before we can pretend to a satisfactory answer to this question!

*John Parker*

### **Depleted Uranium and Other Abuses**

**Rosalie Bertell, *Planet Earth: The Latest Weapon of War*, The Women's Press ([www.the-womens-press.com](http://www.the-womens-press.com)), 2000, £12.99**

This is an important book. Subtitled 'A critical study into the military and the environment', Dr Bertell provides a beginner's guide to the scientific facts which underlie recent wars, and the preparations for future ones. In so doing, she describes in accessible terms how warfare and military research blight the biosphere, that layer of Earth capable of supporting life which consists of air water and soil and is about 16 kilometres wide, extending into the atmosphere, underground and underwater.

At the same time, this is also a pioneering work. Its purpose, in large part, is to bring together the peace and environmental movements in stronger union throughout the world. This is because, as the author makes clear, they share a common purpose since enduring peace, and ending military research, are vital to maintaining Earth's environmental balance. Dr Bertell puts it thus: 'In thinking about Earth as a complex living organism, taking in nourishment from the sun, we note that it actively maintains a stasis, or balance, in the composition of the atmosphere and the salinity of ocean water. It maintains its temperature within narrow and predictable bounds, and it sustains an incredible range of plants and animals.' She explains how it is not only the introduction of toxic materials and other waste that endanger the balance of the Earth's self-regulating system. 'Recent military research and experimentation has gone still further by manipulating the layers of Earth's atmosphere which separate the biosphere from solar and cosmic debris, protecting it from harmful radiation. Much of this research plans to use planet Earth itself as a weapon, harnessing the power of natural processes for war. To me, this is one of the most disturbing, least understood military abuses of the environment.'

Dr Bertell ranges across the history of space exploration and associated military research. She charts its development from the satellite programmes of the 1950s and 1960s when the United States and the Soviet Union vied for domination in space. This provides illuminating historical perspective to the development of Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (Star Wars), and its successor, National Missile Defence (Son of Star Wars). She goes on to describe, with her characteristic clarity, the 'down-to-earth problems with star wars', which include atmospheric modification experiments, using waves to probe the interior of the Earth, and climate change.

But it was depleted uranium which first drew me to Dr Bertell's book. The Campaign against Depleted Uranium (CADU) organised a landmark conference in Manchester in November 2000. There, Rosalie Bertell gave a luminous presentation of how DU dust and smoke harms people. Once in the very alveoli of the lungs, the radiation causes immense damage over tiny distances. Her audience included victims of such contamination from the Gulf War of 1991.

They suffered from multiple illnesses, and had already lost colleagues who had died because they had inhaled DU dust and smoke.

Now, we are starting to count the first victims of DU contamination in the Balkans. About 10,000 rounds had been used in Bosnia earlier in the 1990s. Then, during its 79-day bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, NATO admits to using 'approximately 31,000 rounds of DU ammunition', mainly in and around Kosovo. At first, NATO failed to co-operate with the UN team inquiring into DU contamination, but eventually George Robertson responded to Kofi Annan's request with some limited information about where DU rounds were fired. Presumably, these were mainly larger, armour-piercing rounds, since they were mostly air-launched. We know that very few Yugoslav armoured vehicles were destroyed during the bombardment. But, as *Time* magazine revealed in Spring 2000, this military failure led NATO to conduct a systematic survey of bomb craters in Kosovo. Have the findings of that inquiry been made available to the UN team? What did that survey reveal about depleted uranium contamination?

Dr Bertell reports Felicity Arbuthnot's detective work which uncovered the approach of the British authorities to the use of depleted uranium munitions in 'humanitarian' warfare in the Balkans (*Sunday Herald* August 1, 1999):

'Ministry of Defence personnel in Kosovo have been warned to stay clear of areas which have been affected by depleted uranium weapons unless they are wearing full radiological protective clothing. However, returning refugees have been kept in the dark about the perils of moving back to the highly contaminated areas, with the MoD claiming that responsibility for alerting them lay with United Nations relief workers. When asked if there was a co-ordinated NATO response relating to the returning refugees, the local rebuilding, and to the advice to avoid disturbing areas of depleted uranium (DU) contamination, an MoD spokesperson replied: "There's no specially reviewed policy re DU. It would have to be co-ordinated by NATO. We would follow and adhere to any of their directions."'

Italy, Germany and other NATO countries are checking their personnel who have served in the Balkans, but the British Ministry of Defence has maintained that depleted uranium poses no health risks to service people, and that checks are not necessary. Now, under intense public pressure not least from the victims of DU poisoning themselves, the British Government are having second thoughts. They, and other bodies investigating depleted uranium, would do well to consult Dr Bertell.

Planet Earth is a rich book, containing as it does many insights into the threats to life on Earth. But it will nevertheless encourage all those who read it as it reflects the author's long engagement with science, her own clear-sighted humanity, commitment to peace, and unfailing opposition to war.

*Tony Simpson*

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