

Reviews

Bombing

Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, Granta, 2002, 399 sections, £7.99, ISBN 1 86207 490 9

The Swedish writer, Sven Lindqvist, is one of the most challenging and original voices on the European left, with over twenty five books to his credit, covering a vast scope that includes political economy, travelogue, history, autobiography and literary criticism. Erudite, allusive and genre-breaking, his work combines exhaustive scholarly research with a mordant wit and an uncompromising determination to confront unpleasant truths about Europe's historical relationship with the Third World.

Despite his own impressive academic record, Lindqvist has always been wary of the tendency within academia to dehumanise and objectify the subjects of its research and render its findings inaccessible through the use of dry academic jargon. In the introduction to *Land and Power in Latin America* (1979), a typically idiosyncratic personal investigation into the political economy of Latin America, Lindqvist wrote of academic texts on the same subject that 'In these books no one utters a word – one never sees a living face, nor a landscape. The soil has no smell. The screams are never heard'.

The same cannot be said of Lindqvist's own work, in which the victims of history can be heard and seen, and the crimes committed against them are painstakingly revealed. His books are all characterised by the same moral passion and humanistic concern, the same refusal to accept the established rules of academic discourse, the same search for a new way of writing about history and politics.

A major thread running through his work is the historical impact of imperialism and its racist underpinnings in European thought. In an era in which the history of imperialism is being re-written to justify new and equally insidious forms of conquest, Lindqvist's work represents a sustained and irrefutable indictment of the historical crimes that have been expunged from the official record. In *Exterminate the Brutes* (1995), an anonymous traveller who may or may not be Lindqvist himself, journeys across Africa, using the words from Conrad's deranged Colonel Kurtz as the basis for a journey into the European heart of darkness and an exploration of the genocidal impulse in European civilisation, from the colonial battlegrounds of Omdurman and the Belgian Congo to the Nazi holocaust. *Desert Divers* (2000) continued that journey, in an evocative deconstruction of the way that the romantic European colonial imagination invented the Sahara Desert during the nineteenth century, alternating essays and historical vignettes on famous European travellers to North Africa, with the meditations of Lindqvist's enigmatic narrator.

A History of Bombing takes these investigations further, and remains as provocative and unclassifiable as its predecessors. It is written in 399 short pieces,

none of them more than half a page long, connected thematically by arrows and numbers to construct a kind of narrative maze with no obvious beginning or end. Each section is a self-contained piece, ranging from autobiographical anecdotes about Lindqvist's own boyhood discovery of aerial bombing on the eve of World War Two, to descriptions of early uses of strategic bombing by the Italians in Libya, the Spanish in Morocco, and the bombing of Hiroshima, Korea and Vietnam. Lindqvist has constructed his book so that the reader can 'enter' the text at various suggested points, tracing different narrative sequences back and forth according to different themes, or simply at their own whim.

The experience is initially confusing and disorientating. Put the book down in the morning and you will not remember where you were the night before or how you got there, without having to retrace your steps. But this is not just a tricky literary device. In the introduction, Lindqvist declares that this is no ordinary book, and his deliberate subversion of the conventions of linear narrative is perfectly suited to the tangential way his mind and imagination works, in which connections are made between events, ideas and people that may not seem obvious, or uncovering facts that other historians have either ignored or considered unimportant.

One of the most striking and original features of the book is the way that Lindqvist draws on obscure literary sources, as well as historical facts, weaving in extracts from long-forgotten Edwardian science fiction novels to the apocalyptic Nazi ravings of *The Turner Diaries* alongside the historical crimes he describes. In the process he exposes a terrifying continuum in European thinking far removed from the liberal humane model that many Europeans would like to believe is the essence of their civilisation. Here is Desmond Shaw in the 1926 novel *Ragganok*, describing the future use of the British Air Force to defend London against invasion by African soldiers 'with their white eyes rolling in their black faces':

'The British planes ... simply sprayed into and over the black wretches, who began at once to rush about screaming as their bodies took fire ... in vain did they try to escape from the incinerating fire which just ... left the stench of charred flesh ... in vain did they fling themselves into the Thames, already full of the bodies of their victims.'

This gallant act of extermination saves the day, thanks to our magnificent men in their flying machines, but, as Lindqvist points out, these fantasies of racial domination and technological dominance were already being played out for real in the colonies, as an internal British military report on the impact of aerial bombing to suppress a colonial revolt in 1924 makes clear.

'Where the Arab and Kurd had just begun to realise that if they could stand a little noise, they could stand bombing... they now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage: they now know that within forty-five minutes a full-sized village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape'.

That report was written by Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, the architect of strategic bombing whose bombs would later rain down on the civilian populations of

Hamburg, Dresden and Berlin. Harris first developed his lifelong fascination with strategic bombing during the 2nd Afghanistan war in 1908, and the meticulous and sardonic revelation of his grim career trajectory is typical of Lindqvist's method. Whether he is discussing the fraudulent pretensions of 'surgical precision' bombing or analysing the spurious justification for bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Lindqvist is a relentless and uncompromising investigator and a writer in total control of his material. The result is a book so dense and rich in its remorseless accumulation of anecdotes and historical detail, that the reader leaves it exhausted, right up to its final grim pronouncement:

'Throughout this century, it has been clear that the standard of living enjoyed by the industrialised countries cannot be extended to the world's population. We have created a way of life that must always be limited to a few. Those few can make up a broad middle class in some countries, and a narrow upper class in the rest. The members know each other by their buying power. They have a common interest in preserving their privileges, by force if necessary. They, too, are born into violence. Out of this violence, both that which has already been committed and that which is still dormant, the century's dreams of dominance emerge. The injustice we defend forces us to hold on to genocidal weapons, with which our fantasies can be realised whenever we like. Global violence is the hard core of our existence. And that which is yet to come.'

A History of Bombing was written before September 11th, but recent events have borne out Lindqvist's predictions only too accurately. Once again our politicians and generals are leading us into war against the barbarians, and the Pentagon's megalomaniac fantasies of 'Full Spectrum Dominance' have been carefully subsumed within the war against terrorism in order to make them more palatable to the public. Now when so many Western intellectuals have swallowed the American-led crusade without criticism, when bombs are still falling on Afghanistan and more may shortly be falling on Iraq in the name of freedom and human rights, this book is a salutary corrective to liberal self-delusion, and we should be grateful for Lindqvist's single-minded trawl through the dark sewers of our recent history.

Matt Carr

Islam and September 11

Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Verso, £15 hardback, ISBN 1 85984 679 3

Tariq Ali is well-known as a left-wing political activist, broadcaster, journal editor and novelist, in Britain and more widely in the English speaking world, which includes the Indian sub-continent. In his latest book, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Tariq has set out to help us to understand the background to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. This involves him in giving us a potted history of Islam, a long exposition of the origins of the Arab-Israeli

conflict, and a detailed examination of the dialectical development of the two fundamentalisms, which are referred to in the book's title – that of the Islamic Wahhabi and of United States born-again Christians. He is able to do this from the position of a 'non-Moslem Moslem', whose family were well-connected Punjabi landowners who found themselves on the Pakistan side of the border at the partition of the Indian Empire in 1947. In that year Tariq was not quite four years old and from then on he rejected all religious instruction. After studying at Oxford University he stayed in England while making frequent trips to Pakistan, whenever he was permitted to do so. The book is greatly enriched by Tariq's personal reminiscences.

Islam's Strengths and Weaknesses

The history of Islam, and equally of the Arabs, is one concerning which most Europeans are profoundly ignorant. The reason is the same as in the case of African history, though with much less justification, to wit, that colonial rulers did not wish to recognise that the peoples they had conquered and even enslaved had any history. It was conveniently forgotten that by 800 AD the influence of Islam had spread west to the Atlantic in Portugal and east to the Hindu Kush. Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid empire, had by then a population of two million. It is an essential part of Tariq's story to demonstrate the debt which civilisation owes to the Arab Islamic scholars for preserving the knowledge of the classical world and developing the mathematical studies of the East. Tourists who visit Spain are able to appreciate the riches of Moorish architecture, but few realise that at a time when Oxford or Cambridge libraries in the 13th Century contained a few hundred books, the library of Cordoba held 400,000.

The Ottoman Empire of the Turks, which added the Balkans to Islamic influence has gained a particularly unedifying reputation, still worse than that of the Mongols who added Central Asia and India. But the tourist who visits Istanbul or Cairo or Delhi or Samarkand will know of the beauty of the Mughal buildings. In his 1930s travelogue *The Road to Oxiana*, Robert Byron described the wonders of Islamic art in what is now Afghanistan, but it is unlikely that anything will be left of it after American carpet bombing.

The question inevitably arises in the reader's mind as to how it ind iBelHz9qu7axOr-z3H

will, but Islam shared the same mono-theism. There must have been something in the fact that the Moors came originally from outside Spain, outside Europe.

The Ottomans and Mughals did not lack in confidence and military organisation and they did not suffer any more than the Europeans from internal divisions. What the Europeans had done by the 16th Century was to develop the technological basis for industrialisation through their ship building and capitalist agriculture. The British army had a self-confidence in their victories over the French, which in part enabled Clive to win the battle of Plassey in 1757, but this was really achieved by his winning over the support of Omichund the wealthy Hindu merchant of Calcutta. For where else except in trade with Britain could such merchant wealth be sustained? The development in Britain of industry and especially of an arms industry had changed everything. But why had this not happened in the lands of Islam? India produced steel before Europe and cotton production for export in what is now Bangladesh, against which Lancashire's early cotton manufacturers demanded 100% protection by the British government, until their machines were more efficient than the Indian craftsmen.

The fact was that industrial production was first developed in Europe and especially in Britain and not elsewhere. Existing empires in China, India, Central Asia, Africa and the Americas fell before the advancing Europeans and, once brought into their colonial systems, their peoples were held back in their development and still suffer from the colonial experience. But why only in Europe? Tariq suggests that Islam never had a Reformation such as Christianity experienced in the 16th Century. Arabs and Muslim Indians suffered from this lack. Perhaps, that is to give too strong an influence to the Protestant ethic in the rise of capitalism. This ethic was very evident in Britain, the Netherlands and France and among the European settlers in America. But Russia and Japan and later China and Korea succeeded in industrialisation without a Protestant ethic.

There is another possible explanation for the decline of Islam, which is not entirely dissociated from the Reformation. The Reformation broke up Christian Europe and the Holy Roman Empire into nation states. Capitalism developed under the protection of the nation state. The unity of Islam was preserved despite differences between Shiites and Sunnis and Wahhabis. In particular there was no Arab state. Although there were many kingdoms, none had the authority of the European nation state, and the fact is that the European Powers did their best to ensure that none ever had that authority. The changes in Great Power support given to royal families in Turkey, Egypt, Afghanistan, (Trans)Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, let alone in Greece and the Balkans, have moved like a kaleidoscope, but with the intention of the Powers always that none should be the same colour at the same time. From this we can easily deduce the tragedy of the Arabs in Palestine, caught between their desire for Arab unity and a Palestine state.

The Jewish-Arab Conflict

Contrary to widespread belief, the Jewish diaspora was not the result of Arab incursion into Palestine; it goes back to the Roman Empire. Tariq describes the

final freeing of Jerusalem from the successive Christian crusades to liberate the holy (Christian) places from Islam in the following succinct paragraph, which deserves quotation in full:

‘Saladin’s long march finally ended in victory. Jerusalem was taken in 1187 and once again made an open city. The Jews were provided with state subsidies to rebuild their synagogues. The churches were left untouched. No revenge killings were permitted. Like Caliph Umar five hundred years before him, Saladin proclaimed the freedom of the city for worshippers of all faiths. But his failure to take Tyre was to prove a costly tactical error. Pope Urban despatched the Third Crusade to take back the Holy City and Tyre became their vital base of operations. Their leader Richard Plantagenet reoccupied Acre, executing prisoners and drowning its inhabitants in blood, but Jerusalem survived. It could not be retaken. For the next seven hundred years the city with the exception of one short-lived and inconsequential Crusader occupation, remained under Muslim rule. During this period no blood soiled its pavements.’

The seven hundred years (731 to be exact) takes us to 1918. 1917 was not only the year of the Russian Revolution but also of General Allenby’s entry into Jerusalem after defeating the Turkish armies with the support of Lawrence’s Saudi Arab friends. It was followed by the Balfour Declaration promising a ‘national home for the Jews’, made in exchange for continuing loans from New York to sustain Britain’s war effort. The national home, it was said, should not affect the rights of the other inhabitants. So Palestine was annexed by Britain under what was later termed ‘a mandate’ from the League of Nations. Thus from the very start the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine was a compound of American money and British duplicity. In the 20 years from 1919 to 1939 about 300,000 Jews emigrated mainly from Germany to Palestine making a Jewish population of about 400,000, or somewhat less than half the number of Arabs and three times the number of Christians. The holocaust in Nazi Germany and anti-Semitism in Russia further increased the Jewish population after 1945.

European settlers overseas, whether in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, Kenya or Southern Africa, have always spread the myth that they came to occupy an empty land. In truth they had done much to empty it by destroying the indigenous peoples. In all cases there was bitter resistance. The first Palestinian *intifada* was in 1936-9, and to crush it required the deployment of 25,000 British troops and Zionist auxiliaries helped by bomber squadrons of the RAF . The Zionists have spread the same myth of ‘a land without people’ about Palestine. But in the diaries of the founder of Zionism, which Tariq quotes , Herzl wrote in 1895.

‘We shall try to spirit the penniless across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.’

By 1938 the then Zionist leader Ben-Gurion was defending the concept of ‘compulsory transfer’ arguing that

‘I favour partition of the country because when we become a strong power

after the establishment of the [Israeli] state, we will abolish partition and spread throughout all of Palestine.’

In the event, expropriation was not carried out ‘discreetly and circumspectly’ but by open military actions – a million Arabs in the 1948 war into exile or refugee camps, and most of the rest into the occupied territories after the 1967 war, and finally by intimidation in the Gaza strip and the West Bank today.

Arab Disunity

The question remains why the neighbouring Arab states did not protect, and still have not protected, their fellow religionists. It took fifteen years for them even to recognise Yassir Arafat and the PLA (Palestine Liberation Army). The answer, Tariq says, lies under the ground. The Middle East has the largest reserves of oil in the world, and the largest untapped reserves lie around the Caspian Sea. These last could be accessed via Russia, Turkey or Afghanistan. Surprise, surprise! Both George Bush and his son George W. are Texan oil men. At one time, not so long ago, Texan oil companies had talks in Houston with the Taliban about an oil pipeline across Afghanistan. But for much longer than that the Middle East policies of Britain and then of the United States have been dominated by the need to control the rich oil supplies in the region, and this meant keeping the Russians out.

The United States has done all in its power – and it has a lot of power – to ensure that there are governments friendly to them throughout the region. This has not been without its difficulties, because it has involved not only supporting despotic rulers like President Musharraf of Pakistan, and earlier the Shah of Persia and the Saudis, as well as the aggressive Israelis. It also meant financing and arming those who are now the ‘axis of evil’ – despots like Saddam Hussein so that he should conduct an eight year war against revolutionary Iran and recruiting the ‘terrorist’ mujahadeen of Osama bin Laden so that they should fight against the Russians in Afghanistan. Only then to find that they turned against their erstwhile masters. Even today, it is announced that Arafat’s police chief will be protected from Israeli troops, because he has, or had, links with the Central Intelligence Agency and Israeli security forces. Nothing is quite what it seems when a hegemonic power uses its secret service to advance its aims.

Turkish rule over the Middle Eastern countries throughout the Nineteenth Century was supported by Britain, France and Russia because none of these three wished either of the others or Germany to occupy the vacuum which would be created by Turkish collapse. In the meantime, each took some form of ‘protection’ over the several parts of the Ottoman Empire where their interests lay – the Russians in the Black Sea and Central Asia, the French in Syria and Algeria, the British in Egypt (with special reference to Suez, the route to India), Palestine and Persia (to control Anglo-Persian oil). The Germans in their *drang nach Osten* had their eye on Baghdad and on alliance with the Turks which they cemented in 1914. Finally the Americans, in 1933, by bribing the Saudi monarch won the concession to drill for oil in Saudi Arabia, where oil production began in 1938.

The Dialectic of the Two Fundamentalisms

The Russian Revolution in 1917 sent a shock wave through all the oppressed peoples in the Ottoman Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire even more than in the French and British Empires, just because Russia was that much nearer. National liberation movements from the Turks had been everywhere stultified by Great Power intervention and even occupation, as by the British in Egypt. The result of the Revolution was to force these movements into extreme forms of resistance and terrorism. Communist Parties emerged in Egypt, Iran and Iraq as well as in the Indian Empire, but they found themselves in competition with long standing movements for Islamic revivalism inside the Ottoman Empire. From the middle of the Eighteenth Century Ibn Wahhab had been preaching an ultra-sectarian *jihad* against the deviations from the true Islamic faith. This was nothing new but he combined it with social prescriptions of punishment beatings, stoning of adulterers, hand and arm amputation of thieves, repression of women, and with a political alliance that was to determine the future of what the Europeans called the 'Middle East'.

This was the alliance through marriage of Wahhabi's daughter and the Saudi family. As Tariq writes:

'This combination of religious fanaticism, military ruthlessness, political villainy and the press-ganging of women to cement alliances was the foundation stone of the dynasty that rules Saudi Arabia today.'

Although the Saudi's wings were clipped in 1811 by Muhammed Ali's seizure of power in Egypt and his defeat of the Saud-Wahhabi forces in the Hijaz, the Saudis were able just over a century later, in alliance with the power of the British Empire to establish themselves once more as a regional power and later, as Tariq concludes,

'Another and even more powerful imperial state would entrust them with the entire [Arabian] peninsula. Wahhabism in its purest form – an unalloyed mixture of confessional rigidity and political opportunism – had become an instrument of the infidel.'

Tariq gives us this history because it is out of this combination of military ruthlessness and Islamic Puritanism, the latter seen by the fundamentalists of today to have been abandoned by the Saudis in their ostentatious wealth and finally in their concession of a military base to the Americans for the Gulf War, that Osama bin Laden drew his levy of Wahhabi Arabs to form, together with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the al-Quaida and the image of the true Islam in the Taliban of Afghanistan.

But for this to happen, Tariq tells us that we have to recognise, first, that the British Military Intelligence was in contact with the Muslim Brotherhood from its foundation as an anti-Communist armed underground in Egypt in 1928 and, second, that the United States secret services financed and supported Bin Laden, as their agent against the Soviet action in Afghanistan, just as they had supported Saddam Hussein in their machinations against Soviet influence in Iraq and then in Iran. Terrorism, the 'axis of evil' against which President Bush is now

crusading, with British support, is thus the direct product of American and British world-wide subversive response to the Soviet challenge. That this did not stop at resistance to the emergence of Communist Parties but extended to all liberation movements can be seen from the Central Intelligence Agency inspired coups not only against the Communist Party in Indonesia but against Ben Bella in Algeria, Nkrumah in Ghana, Goulart in Brazil, as well as Kassem in Iraq and Mossadeq in Iran, while in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood attempted three times to kill Nasser, a nationalist like the others on the CIA list and no Communist. Indeed, Tariq makes the point that the Soviet advice to Nasser on the eve of the 1967 Israeli-Egyptian war was not to provoke an Israeli attack, which left him quite unprepared for the attack when it came.

Tariq's concept of a 'clash of fundamentalisms' correctly describes the growth of fundamentalism among Islamic societies and equally of a somewhat similar fundamentalism in the moralistic claims that accompany the United States' assumption of world hegemony. Tariq is right that there is a dialectic at work here when he shows how each has encouraged the other. It is not envy or distaste at the wealth and technology of the United States, that inspires the suicide bombers, as Mr Bush would have Americans believe, but despair at ever getting out from under American surveillance and American repression of any and every act of self-liberation. The list of United States direct military interventions since 1945 – China, Korea, Guatemala (three times), Indonesia, Cuba, the Congo, Peru, Laos, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Grenada, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Bosnia, Sudan, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan – still leaves out indirect intervention through provision of arms and financial support for local armed war lords like Mobutu and Savimbi in Africa and those which Tariq has been uncovering for us in the world of Islam, and which we can see for ourselves now in Israel.

This is not, however, a 'clash of civilisations' as writers like Samuel Huntington have proposed, and as President Bush suggests in his use of the word 'crusade' for what he envisages as the proper response to the events of September 11th. Civilisation is one human process, to which many peoples have contributed over the centuries and to which Islam, as Tariq has reminded us, has made a great contribution. The greatest damage to our common civilisation has come from the fomenting of violence, the encouragement of terrorists and it may still all be destroyed by a nuclear explosion more devastating than Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for which the United States must bear the ultimate responsibility. The danger of nuclear war today must be regarded as more serious than at any time since the worst moments of American-Soviet nuclear rivalry. What Tariq reveals as the response of fundamentalists in Pakistan and in India to the bombing of Afghanistan is frightening.

The kaleidoscope of changes in political allegiance is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the case of Pakistan. As the main base for resistance to a 'socialist' India and to the election in western Pakistan of socialists like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and later his daughter Benazir, the top brass of the Pakistan Army was

for long regarded by the United States as the training ground for their favourite military dictators. They were often raised to power or supported in power by appeal to Islamic fundamentalism. The Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), according to Tariq the ‘most powerful institution in the country’, was, moreover, responsible for the training and arming of militants to join the *jihad* against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal for establishing the Taliban in power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Pakistan’s generals fell from favour and when they exploded a nuclear advice they were cut off from US aid – until once again they were needed, after September 11th, this time to provide a base for United States action against the very forces in Afghanistan which they had earlier created.

Worse even than the Taliban are the fundamentalist forces which have been generated in Pakistan itself, and, given an almost equal growth of fundamentalism in India, Tariq sees that the danger grows of war escalating over Kashmir into a nuclear exchange. They that sow the wind are reaping the whirlwind. The actions in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union were paid for by encouraging the growing of poppies in that country and the heroin business has spread from there along with the Moslem fighters to Bosnia and Kosovo, Chechnya and the Philippines. Now the Christian fundamentalism which has emerged in America is encouraging the launching of a new war against Iraq, and Mr Bush and Mr Blair are having to cry ‘Halt! enough is enough’ to America’s very own first ally, Israel, lest its military incursion into the Occupied Territories should embroil the whole region in bloodshed.

We desperately need in the West a new tolerance, space for peoples as well as nation states and recognition of the inequalities imposed by imperialism, if we are to match Tariq’s appeal to the world of Islam for

‘a rigid separation of state and mosque; the dissolution of the clergy; the assertion by Muslim intellectuals of their right to interpret the texts that are the collective property of Islamic culture as a whole; the freedom to think freely and rationally and the freedom of imagination.’

And we need to support action for peace with Milton’s words to General Fairfax at the siege of Colchester in 1648, ‘For what can war, but endless war still breed?’

Michael Barratt Brown

Letters to Socialists

Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 49, Frederick Engels Letters 1890-1892, Lawrence and Wishart, 640 pp. £45 hardback, ISBN 085315 625 5

This immense collaboration is moving towards its close. The final volume is to be expected next year, 2003, and with it we shall have all the known works of Marx and Engels, including all their correspondence and some newly discovered works.

Volume 49 consists of letters from Engels to a very wide cross-section of Socialist leaders around Europe. It begins in 1890 with a letter to Liebknecht, and it goes on until 1892, with a letter to Karl Kautsky. Seven hundred and eleven pages work through virtually all the problems of the contemporary Socialist movement, especially those associated with the development of the Second International.

Strongly represented are letters about the upsurge of the new unionism in Great Britain, and candid commentaries on the progress of this movement. Engels remained in close contact with William Thorne of the gas workers, whose Union established itself to become the rock upon which was built the present General Municipal and Boilermakers' Union. Ben Tillett and John Burns from the dockers were in regular contact with Engels.

All these letters come to us from a different age. One wonders when Engels ever found time to do anything else but write letters. And yet this correspondence is shot through with detailed advice, and betokens a most comprehensive knowledge of the state of play in all the different Socialist Parties it covers... and, of course, in between this epistolary labour, Engels was editing the final volume of Marx's *Capital* which involved him, as he said, in working through all the original documentation and argument of the book, in order to ensure the accuracy of the version which he was preparing for the press.

If it is true that Marxism has gone out of fashion, then it should be possible to acquire these mighty volumes for another day. Whatever happens to the fashion, they give us an extraordinary insight into their times.

More than half the letters featured here are newly translated, and have not appeared in English before.

KC

Contradictions

Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (editors), *Socialist Register 2002 : A World of Contradictions*, Merlin Press, pp.294, ISBN 0 85036 502 3 £30.00 hardback, ISBN 0 85036 501 5 £14.95 paperback

It was the central message of Marx's more deterministic prophesies that there were intrinsic contradictions in the very processes of industrial capital accumulation that would lead to the collapse of the system and create the working class that would supplant it with a socialist system. That capitalism has survived for 150 years since Marx first made his prophesy and appears indeed rather to have grown in strength, despite some ups and downs, and that a working class socialist succession seems as far away as ever, has for long been an embarrassment to all good comrades.

In the latest issue of the *Socialist Register*, the editors have invited a number of mainly Canadian Marxists to explore the present 'world of contradictions' to

discover what may be learnt from them. Readers would be well advised to read first Ellen Meiksin Woods' final essay, which brilliantly explains 'contradictions' in capitalism in the sense, as she puts it, 'that the very forces that produce an irreducible systemic need at the same time constitute a barrier to the fulfilment of that need.'

The first essay sets the question for the whole volume. This is a thoughtful examination by Naomi Klein of the Porto Alegre process, in which she seeks to unravel the many threads that have been woven together in the anti-globalisation protests from Seattle onwards. If this is the 'Internet come to life', what form could it take, she asks, that could take protest into positive action for social change? Some elements of Marx's working class may be involved, but they are neither central to the process nor at all united in their perspective. Then, what? Unfortunately, the authors do not tell us.

What they do offer are a number of interesting essays on the various attempts made by the owners and controllers of global capital, and by the governments of leading capitalist states, most particularly the United States, to overcome or at least to regulate the most obvious contradictions. These have become much less susceptible of management in the age of so-called 'neo-liberalism', since the removal of the 'Soviet threat', and the consequent ending of the perceived need to accommodate working class aspirations.

None the less, we have to recognise the apparent success of United States economic recovery after the decline in 2001. Moreover, the operations of the G7 Financial Stability Reform and the G10 Central Bank Governors, together with the work of such bodies as the International Association of Insurance Supervisors and Basle Committee on Banking Regulations and Supervisory Practices do provide information and warnings and some form of regulation that did not exist in the 1930s.

In the long run, and it may indeed be very long, the two major contradictions must come to a head – in the increasing imbalance of the growth in productive capacity of accumulated capital compared with the restricted purchasing power of increasingly unequal incomes and the limited energy and physical capacities of the planet. What the result may be of the emergence of a single centre of economic power combined with overwhelming military and political power in the 'full spectrum dominance' of the United States is only hinted at by these authors. But their arguments must lead to the conclusion that, with no countervailing forces, the contradictions become only the more intractable.

MBB