

Reviews

Bolshevik

Steven A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis 1890-1928*, Oxford University Press, 272 pages, hardback ISBN 9780198734826, £25.00

Russia in Revolution was published to mark the centenary of the two revolutions of 1917, in February and October in the old Gregorian calendar, or March and November in the present-day Julian calendar. Whatever the date, the Bolshevik revolution was the first successful seizure of power by a Marxist party committed to implementing socialism. As the author makes abundantly clear, the problem for the Bolsheviks was that Russia was a latecomer to industrialisation. It was a relatively backward country whose economy was still dominated by agriculture and whose mass politics, even after the 1905 revolution and the establishment of the *Duma* or parliament, was still inchoate. Neither had Russia managed a ‘bourgeois revolution’, a factor repeatedly pointed out by Lenin’s detractors within the Bolshevik party — that the proletarian revolution could not be successful and must defer to its bourgeois counterpart. For Lenin the horrors of World War One and the February revolution had changed everything, placing Russia at the head of a European wave of revolution. The Bolsheviks hoped that unrest in Germany had gained sufficient traction to alienate large sections of the working class, and that revolution was possible. This is, perhaps, an aspect of the Bolshevik strategic imperative to which Smith does not give enough weight. The Bolsheviks were united in their hope that Germany would come to the rescue of the fledgling Soviet state — they were to be sadly disappointed.

The book paints a comprehensive picture of Russian society prior to the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. Change was happening, but it was to prove too little too late. The working population was largely ill educated, and the Russian Empire was run by an indolent, repressive autocracy, which had at its head a remote narcissistic Tsar surrounded by a fawning court and the looming figure of Rasputin. (With the country in turmoil on the day the state Duma was to have its first session, Nicholas II wrote in his diary ‘April 14th - Took a walk in a thin shirt and took up paddling again’.) The author paints a picture of a sclerotic society, order maintained by the secret police (the *Okhrana*), the army, the Cossacks, plus a harsh bureaucracy and an orthodox church wedded to the *status quo*. Together they ruled over

a vast landmass with a multi-ethnic and multilingual population. Reforms were attempted, and civil society was developing a factory-owning bourgeoisie in urban areas. In the vast countryside some progressive landowners participated in local government through the *zemstvo* — but all were loath to challenge the autocracy. In 1914, if Russia was backward industrially, by the end of the World War One and the Civil War the situation was infinitely worse. Smith describes the situation in these stark words, ‘The collapse of industry together with grave food shortages led to the near breakdown of urban life . . .’ The crux of the book dwells on the dilemmas of the Bolshevik government in this context, and it makes an honest appraisal of the contending oppositional forces, often based on recent facts and figures released from the Kremlin archives.

Smith dwells on the nature of revolutions and their differences and the very particular aspects of the Bolshevik revolution, which aimed to bring a socialist state into being, setting a path towards a communist future. Although referring to the October Revolution as a *coup d’état*, Smith is confident that the majority of the population, the workers and peasants, welcomed the new regime. Lenin’s *April Theses* was predicated on the expected socialist revolution in Western Europe, which was thought by all factions of the Bolsheviks to be essential for the survival of their own regime. The Introduction does note the immense influence of the Soviet Union on the 20th century, but not without ruminating on the moral dimension of the revolution. Pointing out obvious tensions in the results of October, the author reflects that, whatever the enlightened aims of the Bolsheviks, these could be corrupted by ‘thirst for power, the enthusiasm for violence, and contempt for law and ethics’.

Russia in Revolution takes us through the various phases leading to the revolutions with the first chapter covering the period 1880 up to the revolution of 1905, the ‘dress rehearsal’ for 1917. The interregnum between the 1905 revolution and its suppression, and the outbreak of World War One in 1914, is seen as a period of reaction by most radical observers. Certainly, Lenin was to opine that this period had stabilised Tsarist rule and remarked: ‘we of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution’. For Wayne Dowler, a mainstream academic writer, this was a period where the development of civil society, and in particular the advancement of a cohesive middle class, heralded ‘co-operation and integration’. Smith doubts Dowler’s assertions, and though he agrees that ‘civil society was more entrenched’, he is convinced that under the calm surface lay profound dissatisfaction. For the peasant the release from serfdom was replaced by economic tyranny of

rent, sharecropping and work for the landlord. The *muzhiks*' subservience in terms of their personal life continued long after the abolition of serfdom. For example, permission to marry or to leave the village was at the landowner's whim. The emergent working class was approaching 20 million, according to Smith, when one counts all those involved in construction, mines, transport, with factory workers and miners numbering about 3.6 million. The working conditions of the industrial factory worker are perhaps best described in the quotation from Leon Trotsky: 'snatched from the plough and hurled into the factory furnace'.

Chapter three charts the ebbs and flows of the build-up to the Bolshevik Revolution, and the essential role of Lenin and his successful struggle to convince the party to change course with his famous *April Theses*. The actual seizure of power is covered in a mere four pages, but recognises the indispensable role that Lenin was to play, with Trotsky in charge organisationally. Even while Lenin was still in hiding, many of the Bolshevik leadership were opposed to taking power, but Lenin would not be persuaded otherwise, firing off missives to the vacillating politburo warning, 'History will not forgive us if this opportunity to take action is missed'.

The next chapters take us through the formative years of the Bolshevik state whose infancy was forged in the fratricidal horrors of the Civil War and its accompanying trauma of foreign intervention and blockade. It was not until August 1921 that major troop engagements and foreign interventionist forays ceased, with Makhno and his anarchist army driven into exile. The cost of this violent birth was killing and suffering on a vast scale. Smith gives some indication of the numbers involved: 3.3 million Russian troops in German prison camps; 2.25 million Russian troop fatalities; Russia's financial debt doubled from 1914 to 1917 to 8 million gold roubles; by 1917 something like 9 million Russians in uniform. For Civil War casualties Smith lists 4.7 million military deaths, adding together Red and White Army fatalities, whilst accurate figures for civilian deaths resulting from atrocities, famine and disease are unknown. As to the political and economic history, there are chapters on both War Communism and the New Economic Policy (NEP) and a final chapter on the development of Soviet culture, which up until the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy was an explosive mixture of *avant garde* in all the major art forms. The rise of the bureaucracy is exemplified in a contemporaneous quotation from an I.B Krasin, a delegate to the 10th party conference to the effect that the party consisted of '10% idealists who are ready to die for the idea, and 90% hangers-on without consciences'. Smith notes that in the

party purge of 1921 some 24% of the membership were 'excluded' for such behaviour as drunkenness, careerism, unreliability, and a 'dissolute way of life'!

With the country wracked by acute food shortages, the collapse of industry, and the near total destruction of the industrial base, the Bolsheviks decided that only an extreme response would combat such a terrible situation — War Communism, as described in chapter five, a policy which forced a continuation of the organisational norms of the military. Compulsion was its main instrument, combined with an appeal to socialist instincts of self-sacrifice by putting 'politics in command'. However bleak the situation seemed to be, an iron will could overcome the problem. All this had more than a smattering of 'barracks communism', as described disapprovingly by Marx. Famine again stalked the land — forcible requisitioning of grain from the peasantry divided city and country and could not last. Reluctantly, the so-called 'New Economic Policy' was introduced, restoring market economy in many areas, particularly agriculture. The leading faction within the Politburo, led by Bukharin and Stalin, maintained that the NEP would stimulate the economy and restore balance between the town and country. Stalin later abandoned his accommodation of the peasantry, replacing it with enforced collectivisation, which was carried out at terrible human cost. Bukharin's inquisitors at his show trial must have found useful his contemporaneous appeal to kulaks and 'Nepmen' to 'enrich yourselves', but his fate, whatever he said, was sealed, and he was shot in 1938.

Russia in Revolution is, in general, sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause, but this does not inhibit the author from trenchant criticism of the use of terror in the Civil War and the activities of the Cheka. Trotsky openly defended the use of terror in his book *Terrorism and Communism*. Less erudite Bolsheviks proclaimed in the columns of the paper *Krasnyi Mech* (*Red Sword*),

'Everything is permitted to us, because we are the first in the world to raise the sword, not in the name of enslavement and oppression but of general happiness and liberation from slavery.'

Smith includes relatively little on the clashes in the Politburo, and the Left Opposition's struggle against the direction of march of the revolution is not fully explored. Neither does the author put much emphasis on the failure of revolution in Europe, in particular Germany, which was integral to Lenin's strategy. Lenin himself had little faith in the survival of the

Russian revolution without the aid of a radical seizure of power in Germany.

Of course, any book on the Soviet Union that is even mildly sympathetic towards Bolshevik power has to contend with the accusation that Stalin's murderous repression was a continuation of the Leninist doctrine of the Party. Rest assured this argument will continue to be debated in Left and Right circles *ad infinitum*. The argument about what kind of political formation can engender the sorts of changes necessary to bring about a successful social revolution still continues to look towards the Russian experience, and this book should be welcomed for its clarity and its willingness to examine the birth pangs of this truly momentous revolution. Certainly the author, in an internet video interview, agreed with Tariq Ali, author of *The Dilemmas of Lenin* (Verso 2017), that without Lenin there would have been no Russian Bolshevik revolution. One can't help asking the question: would Lenin have proceeded with his project if he had known the cost in human life and its outcome? Ali maintains that, without October, the White generals would have been the dominant force, dispatching to the wind the gains of February.

One particular contemporaneous observer's reflections, those of Bertrand Russell, have in part certainly stood the test of time. Russell went to Soviet Russia in 1920. He met, or saw in action, all the major actors in the revolution and was to remark unambiguously about his meeting with Lenin:

'He (Lenin) is very friendly and apparently simple, entirely without a trace of *hauteur*. If one met him without knowing who he was, one would not guess that he is possessed of great power or even that he is in any way eminent. I have never met a person so destitute of self-importance.'

In a more sombre appraisal, Russell thought Lenin too dogmatic:

'I think if I had met him without knowing who he was, I should not have guessed that he was a great man; he struck me as too opinionated and narrowly orthodox. His strength comes, I imagine, from his honesty, courage unwavering faith — in the Marxian gospel, which takes the place of Christian martyrs' hopes of Paradise, except it is less egotistical.'

Russell made an appeal to the West, which fell on deaf ears:

'But it is essential to a happy issue that melodrama should no longer determine

our views of the Bolsheviks: they are neither angels to be worshipped nor devils to be exterminated, but merely bold and able men attempting with great skill an almost impossible task.'

He pointedly attacked what he conceived as the dogmatism of the Bolsheviks:

'I went to Russia a socialist: but contact with those that have no doubts has intensified a thousandfold my own doubts, not as to socialism in itself, but as to the wisdom of holding a creed so firmly that for its sake men are willing to inflict widespread misery.'

But Russell knew that if he was a Russian he would be with the Bolsheviks:

'Even under present conditions in Russia, it is still possible to feel the inspiration of the essential spirit of communism, the spirit of creative hope, seeking to sweep away the incumbrances of injustice and tyranny and rapacity which obstructs the growth of the human spirit, to replace individual competition by collective action, the relation of master and slave by free co-operation.'

In a fascinating and thoughtful Conclusion, Smith tries to make the connections between the extreme violence which was endemic in the semi-feudal Tsarist society, the directed violence of Lenin's infant state, and its apotheosis in Stalin's terror. Did Stalinism see the recall of the patrimonial state, as Richard Pipes has suggested, which finds expression in Eisenstein's film, *Ivan the Terrible*? Do we see something of this in the cult of Putin? Maybe, but the author warns, quite rightly, that 'culture is contested' and we must be careful not to fall into a tunnel vision approach when thinking about Russia. We should not forget the historical harm inflicted upon Russia by the West and the twist such pressure has applied to its social and political life. *Russia in Revolution* sheds light on the ambitions and mistakes of that tenuous first workers' state. It was driven by the finest of ambitions, as Russell saw all those years ago.

John Daniels

Savage land of Muscovy

David Burke, *Russia and the British Left: From the 1848 Revolutions to the General Strike*, I.B. Tauris, 2018, 322 pages, hardback ISBN 9781788310642, £72.00

Theodore and Andrew Rothstein dominate the narrative. With David Burke there's some sense of 'Déjà Lu all over again' (Yogi Berra). First, there was his 1997 doctoral thesis, covering the same ground, albeit stopping at 1920 (details online). Then an essay, 'Theodore Rothstein, Russian Emigré and British Socialist,' reproduced online from John Slattery's (ed.) *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880-1917*. Ancillary subsuming volumes include *The Lawn Road Flats* and *The Spy Who Came In From The Co-op* (Melita Norwood).

Though lavishly quoting from Rothstein's multifarious articles and speeches, virtually none appear in Burke's bibliography. The online Marxist Archive provides a long list of essays in such journals as *The Communist International*, *The Social Democrat*, *Justice*, and *The Call*.

As Marx and Engels, also Lenin (Trotsky and Stalin to lesser degree), Rothstein was devoted to classical literature, writing articles on Roman poets and poetry: a shame his projected book on Cicero never materialized.

Were it not for their other manifest ineptitudes, I'd share Burke's bewilderment at British Intelligence services' (on which he has much of interest to say) recruitment of Rothstein as an agent.

After a brief Introduction setting out his bibliographical and thematic stall, Burke opens with the careers and ideologies of Alexander Herzen and Sergei Stepnyak, nowadays hardly household names. No mention of Tom Stoppard's dramatic resuscitation of Herzen (with Bakunin, Belinsky, and Turgenev) in his 2002 trilogy *The Coast of Utopia*, his laudations (likewise Isaiah Berlin in *The Russian Thinkers*) inspired by the spectacular party Herzen threw (10 April 1861) at Ossett House (Paddington) to celebrate Tsar Alexander II's Emancipation of the Serfs.

Though anathema to Marx, Herzen remains a memorable orator-writer, abounding in aphorisms (see the website collection) such as:

'In general modern man has no solutions.'

'Human Development is a form of chronological unfairness.'

'Life has taught me to think, but thinking has not taught me to live.'

Herzen is often dubbed 'The Father of Russian Socialism'. Stepnyak, by contrast, is best remembered for assassinating secret police chief Nikolai

Mezentsov in St. Petersburg (1878), plus his own demise, hit by a train in Chiswick. For more, see David Saunder's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry, plus James Coll, *The Anarchists* (p.103) and Alex Butterworth's *The World that Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists & Secret Police* (p.92) — neither in Burke.

Early in Burke's parade comes Theodore Rothstein's political mentor Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, kinsman and inspiration of Anthony. Other such past-present links include Kerensky's secretary David Soskice, father of Labour Home Secretary (under Wilson) Frank, and Donald Maclean, progenitor of the future Cambridge spy.

Also (alas), two very-modern-sounding themes pervade the book: perpetual sectarian in-fighting (Stepnyak and Plekhanov being early maddened by this permanent impediment to progress, Henry Hyndman singled out as main culprit) and rampant anti-Semitism in Labour circles, balanced by Churchill's offensive attempt to (Burke's words) engineer a split between East End and West End Jewry.

The many modern despisers of the *Daily Mail* won't be surprised by its frequent reactionary role in these early days, above all gleeful publication of the 'Zinoviev Letter', widely dismissed as a fake. At (Burke might have added) Robin Cook's behest, expert Gill Bennett's report concluded it was probably concocted by White Russians at Riga — has anyone suggested the *Mail's* editorial office?

There's another, lighter past-present link. We all know about the Blair-Brown 'Granita' restaurant pact. A clandestine meeting between Rothstein, Litvinov and British counterparts to cement recognition of Bolshevism was held at a Lyons Corner House. When Rothstein introduced *Daily Herald* editor Meynell to potential Russian financiers, it was at the luxurious Floral Frascati's restaurant — quite a step up from Joe Lyons...

Chapter 2 (Its title, 'East End Jewish Marxist', recalls Arnold Wesker's famous dramatic trilogy) concentrates on Rothstein *père* and his constant warfare with Hyndman, both foreign policy (Boer War and Persia), more importantly (and enduring — Lenin frequently adverted to it) over the relative importance of Socialist propagandizing and trade union activism. The latter can of course take embarrassing turns, e.g. Sid Harroway's 'The Social Contract? You Can Stuff It!' and London Dockers marching for Enoch. Nor would Rothstein's paraded contempt for Keir Hardy have gone down well in some circles.

These themes occupy the next chapter on London Congresses and the Second International. There is much on Wilfrid Blunt and Egyptian

matters bulk large, on which Burke might have profited from Gabriel Warburg's *A History of the Egyptian Intelligence Service*, also Michael Pearce's delightful *Mamur Zapt* fictional series. Lenin appears on the London stage, so visibly that it is hard to see how British Intelligence could (p. 127) regard him as 'a mystery man'.

Lenin in London is balanced by Trotsky with his *Nashe Slovo* magazine in Paris. Their clash over 'Revolutionary Defeatism' (Lenin) and the influential Zimmerwald Manifesto (Trotsky) also figures.

In contrast with his attention to Lenin's writings, especially '*Left Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Burke is sparing with Trotsky's. Given its timing and relevance to his own book, I'm surprised he didn't spend some time on *Where Is Britain Going?* (1925).

Another key Russian on the British scene was Georgii Chicherin, future Soviet Foreign Affairs Commissar. *Spokesman* readers will light upon one of his trade union fellow-activists — Bertrand Russell. Not that this saved the latter from a vicious personal attack by Karl Radek in *Pravda* (October 24, 1920, English version online, along with the gloss that Russell would prefer prison to giving up his sense of humour – see below).

Similarly, they will be struck by Maxim Litvinov's ill-concealed call for a British workers' armed insurrection delivered to great applause at the Labour Party Conference (1916) in Nottingham.

Space precludes the detailed attention Burke's other chapters deserve. Many, of course, are familiar: The Great War, The Bolshevik Revolution, The General Strike, all involving countless now largely forgotten participants and manoeuvres, ably disentangled by Burke.

One topic to which Burke gives oddly short thrift is the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). There are, obviously, many separate accounts of this, from which I single out Francis Beckett's, if only for its title *Enemy Within*, unmentioned by Burke who does though echo the phrase, one notoriously applied to the striking coal miners by Mrs Thatcher, also adopted as their name by an American heavy metal band.

Burke sums up his main themes in a brief but illuminating Epilogue, with acute discussion of the so-called 'Henry Telling Conundrum'. His engrossing work is lucidly written, sometimes witty, jargon-free; one minor black mark for frequently repeating lengthy source quotations. It is meticulously researched from vast archival sources, conversations with Andrew Rothstein, and a plethora of articles and books, also unpublished theses. I'd have added Eric Hobsbawm's *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011*. All buttressed by nearly 50 pages of tersely informative, sometimes provocative endnotes. Seventeen black-and-white

plates include the first likeness of Lenin published in Britain.

Indispensable for future researchers, this admirable investigation favourably reverses the meaning of 'To Burke the issue'.

Barry Baldwin

Bertrand Russell's Sentimental Journey



Karl Radek circa 1930

Many of our British guests have published articles and books of impressions on their journey to the savage land of Muscovy. As might have been expected, true Radicals express deep sympathy for our labours and struggles, while disguised Conservatives try to help the forces which would crush us. We anticipated nothing else.

When Tom Shaw, the well-known British opportunist, asked our Soviet representatives with childlike naïveté how they could imagine that such a high-born gentleman as the Right Honourable Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, the grandson of the Seventh Duke of Marlborough, the son of Lord Randolph Churchill, could lie, it showed that Mr. Shaw himself, although of low birth and a servant of the British bourgeoisie, would lie to injure soviet Russia at the bidding of that bourgeoisie. Consequently we were not surprised when Tom Shaw delivered a thunderous speech against the soviet government at the congress of the Yellow International, accusing it of oppressing the workmen.

The secretary of the delegation, Dr. Guest, by publishing in that yellowest of international papers, the London *Times*, a series of attacks on soviet Russia, merely proves what we were warned against when we permitted him to enter Russia, that he came to get information for the British government. In order to enable honest labour representatives to come to Russia, we had to admit also ordinary spies, who now shamelessly unmask themselves. Their 'revelations' of soviet Russia do no real harm, because every honest British workman knows, from his daily reading, that *The Times* and the whole Northcliffe press are fighting the British proletariat. He knows, too, that Dr. Guest's 'revelations,' are worth to the

bourgeoisie the price he is paid for his lies. By comparing Dr. Guest's articles with those of Paul Duke, an acknowledged spy of the British government, published in the same 'honest' newspaper, any British workman can see how monotonously alike they are.

If Mrs. Ethel Snowden, the erstwhile beautiful pacifist and representative of British workmen, thought she could fascinate us by her pretty manners, it does not follow that we supposed for one minute that this bourgeois goose was competent to understand the revolution of the Russian proletariat. Being 'gallant,' we pretended to believe her enthusiasm was sincere when she told us, while watching a military review, that she quite approved of such militarism, since it was to defend the labour commonwealth. But we knew that stern proletarian revolution was not suited for Mrs. Snowden's delicate nerves, and that on her return to England, she would burst into tears upon the manly breast of Mr. Philip Snowden, who would say to her: 'Why did you go to that barbarous country? Didn't I tell you that it's not the place for British ladies to take a vacation? Better go to Belgium or to Northern France, where you can rest and visit war ruins.'

It is not worth while to discuss in detail articles written by Shaw, Guest, or Mrs. Snowden. But it is interesting to pause a moment over the two articles by Bertrand Russell in *The Nation*, the leading organ of the British liberals. Bertrand Russell is a remarkable philosopher and mathematician, as well as an absolutely honest man. He suffered persecution in a British prison for his pacifism. We believe he has no selfish purpose in writing what he does. His articles have value as demonstrating the narrowness of even the best of the bourgeoisie, their utter inability to comprehend the problems which history has placed before mankind.

Mr. Russell describes soviet Russia, stating clearly that the soviet government placed no obstacles in the way of his companions or himself and gave them full opportunity for an objective study of the Russian situation. What did he see in Russia? Of the Communists, he speaks very favourably. He says that they do not spare themselves, just as they do not spare others; that they work sixteen hours a day, forgetting about holidays; that, in spite of the power they hold, they live very modestly, seek no personal aims, but devote themselves unsparingly to building a new society. And he comes to the conclusion that the Russian Communists are very much like the English Puritans of Cromwell's time. But

'life in Russia today, just as it was in the Puritan England, runs counter to human instinct. If the Bolsheviki fall, it will be for precisely the same

reason that English Puritanism fell: time will come when people will realize that the joy of life is of greater value than anything that Puritanism has to offer.'

There is no doubt that Mr. Russell is an 'altruist'; his whole life is a proof of this. Yet Mr. Russell has not given up his comfortable home, his quiet study, his weekends in the country, his visits to the theatres, and all the other things which even the perishing capitalistic world still has to offer a man of wealth like himself.

Therefore it is no wonder that he considers a revolution in which the telephone, a piece of white bread, a can of condensed milk, or - oh, horror! - an automobile, is a luxury, is not good; for Bertrand Russell can endure such a revolution no longer than two weeks, and even then when provided by us with guest quarters and other special comforts. Therefore Mr. Russell does not ask himself what comforts would have been provided for the Russian workmen, if Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich, and Wrangel had won a victory with British aid.

Mr. Russell considers the Communists the young, virile aristocracy of new Russia. And he says that in many respects soviet Russia reminds him of Plato's Republic. Since up to now, the word 'Plato' has not been considered derogatory, we ought to be grateful to Russell even for that. But what is hidden behind Russell's views on the situation in Russia is concretely expressed in the following words:

'When a Russian Communist speaks of dictatorship, he uses that word in a literal sense, but when he speaks of proletariat, he uses that word in a Pickwickian sense. He has in mind the class-conscious part of the proletariat, that is, the Communist Party. He includes men who have nothing in common with the proletariat so far as their origin is concerned - like Lenin and Chicherin - but who have the proper views. He excludes real workmen who do not have these views, and whom he calls lackeys of the bourgeoisie.'

What a dreadful thing, indeed, is this, which Bertrand Russell has discovered in soviet Russia! But to help him understand what he saw, let us remind him of social relations in England herself. He comes from the high aristocracy and belongs to the bourgeoisie. But when, during the war, he, as a pacifist, did not act as the bourgeoisie demanded, the latter ceased to consider him a member of the same class as itself, but threw him into prison as an enemy of that class. At the same time, it made Mr. Henderson,

who is a common workman, a cabinet minister, because he defended its interests. Or let us recall a still more striking instance. One of the leaders of the Chartist movement in England was Ernest Jones, a scion of an aristocratic family. He was a godson of the Hanoverian King, and was brought up at the royal court. But when in 1846, he took part in the revolutionary agitation of the British workmen, he was thrown into prison, where he was kept for two years, under conditions which caused the death of many who were incarcerated with him.

So it appears that the unheard-of thing which Mr. Russell saw in Russia, that everyone who fights for the proletariat is a soldier of the proletariat, is something common to all struggling classes. They consider as their own those who actually fight for their interests, and not those who happen to spring from their loins.

Mr. Russell declares that he opposes communism for the same reasons for which he is a pacifist. Civil war, like any other kind of war, brings with it enormous sufferings and misfortunes, while its good is more than problematic. And in the struggle, civilization itself is doomed to perish. We have already seen how highly Mr. Russell values the civilization that has given rise to a four-year war!

To conquer, we must have a concentration of power, and every concentration of power begets evils. Mr. Russell has before him two types of the concentration of power. The first is the capitalistic government of Great Britain and its Allies, which precipitated the world into mutual slaughter, and which still ruins its happiness and welfare. Mr. Russell does not like Lloyd George; still less does he like Churchill. The second is the government of soviet Russia, which bends every effort toward rescuing the common people from the misfortunes brought upon them by capitalism. It is a government making an heroic attempt to reconstruct society from the foundation. But it cannot fight the whole capitalistic world successfully by mere guerrilla warfare. It is forced to organize a Red army, a huge food-supply apparatus, centralized economic control. But Mr. Russell says that this is not good, since it creates privilege: no matter how modest the commissars may be, still they have automobiles, the use of telephones, theatre tickets.

Now, what is Mr. Russell to do, wedged in between these two horrid governments, trying the best they can to monopolize power? Having returned from his sentimental journey, and taken a good bath, he, no doubt, seated himself in front of a fireplace - how wonderful are the old English fireplaces! Although he is not a commissar, there is no doubt that he does not have to suffer for lack of wood, even though the poor in the East End

freeze to death. So, Mr. Russell put on his house slippers and dressing robe, and began to read in the newspapers of Europe's agony, which went on uninterrupted during his absence. Even Miss Gibbs writes openly about the matter in Lloyd George's own *Daily Chronicle*. As he read, there rose in Mr. Russell's heart a feeling of displeasure; for how can a good, clever, wealthy man experience pleasure, when he sees others suffering? And Mr. Russell declared in *The Nation*:

'Though I cannot preach the world revolution, neither can I rid myself of the conviction that the governments of the leading countries are doing everything in their power to bring it about.'

How bad are the capitalistic governments, and how good is Bertrand Russell! It is not improbable that he may again find himself in prison; and we only hope that, because of his excellent family connections, his punishment may not be excessively severe. We wish him nothing but good; but what value is there to his senseless sacrifices?

During his stay in Moscow, Bertrand Russell declared that he would rather go to prison than give up his sense of humour. We sometimes fancy that all his philosophy, all his pacifism and Socialism, are merely a way in which this scion of British aristocracy jokes at its crude oppression and maraudery. If they had only arranged things better, 'more delicately,' so that Mr. Russell could enjoy the privileges of his position without experiencing the pangs of conscience: they are so unpleasant, those pangs of conscience!

What a sorry sight does the capitalistic world present, if in the face of the most gigantic catastrophe of all history, it can devise no better philosophy than that of Mr. Russell! His philosophy reminds us of Aesop's fable of the ass, which had placed before it oats and hay, and died of starvation while debating which it should eat first. We apologize to Bertrand Russell for comparing him to so stupid a beast as an ass, but we also apologize to that honest grey toiler, for comparing him to so parasitical a being as our petty-bourgeois 'philosopher.'

Karl Radek

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How fascists organise?

Simon Winlow, Steve Hall and James Treadwell, *The rise of the Right: English nationalism and the transformation of working class politics*, Policy Press, 2017, 219 pages, paperback SBN 99781447328483

With the news in September 2017 that National Action, Britain's first proscribed neo-Nazi group since the 1939-45 War, had infiltrated the Army, it might be hoped that *The rise of the Right* would be able to offer important insights into how today's fascists organise and the extent of their influence. The English Defence League (EDL), ostensibly the subject of this book, appears to be different from the smaller, youth-oriented National Action, but both use violent demonstrations to incite racial hatred (the EDL specifically anti-Muslim feeling) and both actively use social media to spread their views and to organise demonstrations. They are both opportunist: the EDL blatantly targeting towns and cities such as Rotherham to foment anti-Muslim feeling, while National Action have been behind offensive publicity stunts (such as organising a Hitler salute outside York Minster) to promote white supremacist ideas.

The authors (all white, male British professors) interviewed EDL activists and fellow-travellers to enable the reader 'however briefly, to see the world as EDL supporters see it'. They acknowledge that some will say this gives the EDL 'publicity' and 'credibility' but, in their view:

'...those who simply oppose what they do not understand are running away from the political reality of our times. If social scientists are to assist in the task of making sense of that reality, we can't simply restrict ourselves to the nice topics. We can't simply praise the nice people and condemn the bad...'

This is both simplistic and patronising. They then comment that their analysis of the wider context which spawned the EDL may not be welcomed by many on what they call the 'political and academic left' who might:

'... feel uncomfortable and perhaps mildly aggrieved. No matter. We will report the world as we found it, and we will explain that world in a manner that seems to us useful and appropriate.'

So just having turned a few pages, we wondered if reviewing this book

was a good idea. Nevertheless, it was read from cover to cover including the authors' blog from the Policy Press website, which is included at the end of the book. This was written after the EU referendum in June 2016, and has an air of '*we told you so*' in relation to the way immigration rather than the economy affected the way the referendum vote divided in many places.

So how useful is this book? Generally, there is a problem with the tone, especially in the early chapters 'Dead politics' and 'The fickle parent'. For example, there is anger, contempt and name-calling in their account of the politics of New Labour and the Coalition Government, and it is often difficult to disentangle their opinions from what is factually based as there are few references to authoritative work. For example, their account of times before and after the 2008 financial crisis is too sweeping. It is not sufficiently focused on austerity measures that have had a devastating effect on working-class individuals, families and communities. This is important because many of the EDL members they spoke to claimed that the recent decline of their community was what propelled them into action: drugs, deteriorating services and shops and, in some places, a Muslim presence which they did not want. It would have helped to have placed these comments in their appropriate contexts. To what extent was the EDL response typical? Without this, and a more cautious evaluation of what the authors were being told, it often seemed as if the authors considered the EDL and the 'white working class' as synonymous, which is far from the case.

The next four chapters concentrate on the comments and conversations the authors had with EDL members up to 2015 in their homes, down the pub, on street corners and at the bookies. There are four 'themes', indicated by the chapter headings: 'Redundant,' 'The hated centre,' 'The scapegoat' and 'Mourning and melancholia'. In each chapter, the format is introductory remarks followed by long quotations from individual interviews/conversations and then an analytical section followed by a conclusion. In 'The scapegoat' EDL members explain why they hate Muslim families and Islam. In 'The hated centre' their abhorrence of politicians, especially Labour Party and left-leaning politicians, is detailed (what the authors confusingly often berate as the 'metropolitan liberal elite').

The comments in these chapters are often outrageous, but familiar: EDL members denying they are racist or fascist and that all they want to do is alert the general public to the apparent dangers of Muslim culture and Islam. The authors make the point that EDL supporters, apart from the

'hard-liners,' seem to have a limited involvement span. The organisation does not appear to have a leadership or 'vanguard,' is not interested in parliamentary politics, and is unable to move on from violent street protest. But the authors' treatment of EDL members' comments seems to be incomplete and naive in places. For example, for supporters attending a demonstration, being corralled into side streets by police and shouted at by anti-fascists may be exciting to begin with:

'Many of our contacts who were active in street protests were or had been involved in football hooliganism. Heading to a street protest in another town or city was just like going to an away game, and for a time, that's what they liked about it. They would start drinking early on, maybe have a few lines of cocaine and a bit of a laugh with the lads, then they would experience the adrenaline of spilling off the coach to be surrounded by opponents and quite often the police. There was also a chance they might get to throw a few punches, and return home with a story to tell.'

But it wore a bit thin for them after a while, with a larger and more controlling police presence and more effective anti-fascist counter-demonstrations and publicity. If these professors had possessed wider experience and knowledge, they would have linked football hooliganism in the EDL to similar links within their predecessors, the British National Party, the National Front, the British Movement, the League of Empire Loyalists and the British Union of Fascists. Instead, they claim that ultimately they came to the conclusion that the EDL could not move on because it 'couldn't find a leader or a political ideology because it was a reluctant and fragile entity forged purely on postmodern cynicism and negativity'. Really?

The way in which EDL supporters are treated in this book should raise alarm bells. When does it become unacceptable to reproduce long, offensive and intimidating fascist rants? While the comments of EDL supporters (who were usually men) were not always taken at face value, most of them must have avoided talking about their use of intimidating and violent behaviour at demonstrations. Why was there no evaluation of the impact of these on particular local areas? And why was the content of EDL websites and use of social media not the subject of detailed scrutiny? By omitting these, the authors were susceptible to being deliberately misled by part-truths. Worse still, the reader might be left under-estimating the continuing impact of the EDL's anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Cathy Davis and Alan Wigfield

From December 2016, support or membership of National Action, an anti-Semitic, white supremacist group became a criminal offence under the 2000 Terrorism Act. The Anti-Fascist Network and the Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies at Teeside University can provide more information.



**THE
DOOMSDAY
MACHINE**

**CONFESSIONS OF A
NUCLEAR WAR
PLANNER**

**DANIEL
ELLSBERG**

Scorching

Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a nuclear war planner*, Bloomsbury, 2017, 432 pages, hardback ISBN 9781408889299, £20

It's not every day that an insider tells us how preparations for nuclear war have been proceeding. So, when one does, it's worth sitting up and taking notice.

Although Daniel Ellsberg is best known for his 1971 role in delivering the Pentagon Papers (the top secret Defense Department study of US involvement in Vietnam) to the American people, he spent much of his 13-year career as a military analyst at the highest levels of the US national security apparatus grappling with issues of nuclear war.

Ellsberg's tasks for the Rand Corporation and the Defense Department included studying how to deter, avert, control, limit, or terminate a nuclear Armageddon between the United States and the Soviet Union, providing McGeorge Bundy (President Kennedy's national security advisor) with an early briefing on existing nuclear planning, and writing the Kennedy administration's top secret guidance for the US operational plan for general nuclear war. In addition, he was the only person to serve on two of the working groups reporting to the executive committee of the US National Security Council during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1963, he was the sole researcher in a government study of past US nuclear crises, with a classified access several levels above 'top secret'. As he writes here:

'These functions gave me an unusual knowledge . . . of the nature of the plans and operations of the nuclear forces and the dangers these posed.'

This background informed Ellsberg's decision to copy and release much more than the Pentagon Papers. Horrified by what he had learned about the readiness of the United States and the Soviet Union to exterminate a substantial portion of the human race, he copied everything in his government files with the intention of exposing it to public scrutiny and discussion. He released the Vietnam material first, for war was already ravaging that land. But he always regarded his nuclear records as more important, for they revealed how fragile the survival of world civilization had become. Ironically, however, the nuclear material, hidden by Ellsberg's brother in a compost pile and, later, in the hillside adjoining a

garbage dump, was buried or swept away in a tropical hurricane.

Consequently, bringing the full range of his nuclear revelations to public attention took Ellsberg considerably longer than he anticipated. Over the following decades, while giving lectures and participating in numerous antinuclear conferences and demonstrations, he laboriously reconstructed his missing files from memory, located documents through Freedom of Information Act requests, and drew upon newly declassified government records. He also spoke with national security officials and read extensively on nuclear issues. Nevertheless, despite Ellsberg's extraordinary knowledge of nuclear war planning and the overriding importance of confronting the issue of human survival in the nuclear age, 17 publishers rejected *The Doomsday Machine* before it was finally accepted for publication. The result, though, is a book commensurate with Ellsberg's courage and unwavering determination — eloquent, honest, and packed with fascinating revelations.

Perhaps the most startling of the revelations is that the leaders of the nuclear powers have delegated authority to initiate nuclear war to military commanders and even to their military subordinates. After Ellsberg discovered the adoption of this alarming policy by the Eisenhower Administration, he reported it to the Kennedy White House, only to find that Kennedy continued it, as did Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter, and— as he notes— ‘almost certainly . . . every subsequent president to this day’. Indeed, General Curtis LeMay, the US Air Force Chief of Staff, argued that, when it came to launching a nuclear war, US presidents should be left out of the picture entirely. ‘After all,’ LeMay remarked gruffly to Ellsberg and a White House official, ‘who is more qualified to make that decision: some politician . . . or a man who has been preparing all his adult life to make it?’ According to Ellsberg, ‘it is virtually certain’ that this same secret delegation of authority to military officers ‘exists in every nuclear state’.

The reason for the remarkable looseness of command in launching a nuclear holocaust is that the leaders of nuclear-armed nations fear a ‘decapitating’ nuclear strike that, by snuffing out their centralized command and control systems, will prevent them from ordering a retaliatory nuclear assault. Therefore, they gravitate towards diversifying their opportunities for waging nuclear war. In the Soviet Union and, later, Russia, the authorities went so far as to establish a ‘Dead Hand’ system in which machines have the authority to launch a full-scale nuclear war in response to an American attack on their central command and control system.

Ellsberg's discussion of the reasons for the development and

maintenance of the massive US nuclear weapons system is less startling, though no less disturbing. ‘The *declared* official rationale for such a system,’ he observes, ‘has always been primarily the supposed need to deter— or if necessary respond to —an aggressive Russian nuclear first strike against the United States’. But that’s ‘a deliberate deception,’ he contends, for that ‘has *never* been . . . the primary purpose of our nuclear plans and preparations’. Instead, they represent an ‘attempt to limit the damage to the United States from Soviet or Russian retaliation to a *U.S. first strike* against the USSR or Russia’. In particular, this nuclear capability is ‘intended to strengthen the credibility of US threats to initiate limited nuclear attacks, or escalate them . . . to prevail in regional, initially non-nuclear conflicts’.

Ellsberg reports that,

‘contrary to the cliché that “no nuclear weapons have been used since Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” US presidents *have used* our nuclear weapons dozens of times in “crises,” mostly in secret from the American public (though not from adversaries).’

US officials have employed them as threats, just as ‘a gun is used when it is pointed at someone in a confrontation’— to ‘get one’s way’. Thus, for example, the Nixon Administration threatened the government of North Vietnam with a nuclear attack on 13 occasions. Ellsberg also outlines 24 other US government threats, from Presidents Truman through Clinton, to initiate nuclear war against a variety of countries.

Naturally, to bolster these threats, the US government has insisted upon not only the massive nuclear arsenal needed for a ‘first strike’ (a nuclear attack on an enemy’s nuclear facilities to prevent retaliation), but the right to ‘first use’ of nuclear weapons (the initiation of nuclear war). Ellsberg notes that no major party presidential candidate or president ‘has ever come close to adopting and proclaiming a no-first-use policy’. Asked about a nuclear attack upon Iran in 2006, President George W. Bush stated emphatically: ‘all options are on the table.’ During the 2007-2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign, Barack Obama temporarily went off message and, asked by a reporter whether there was any circumstance in which he’d use nuclear weapons in Afghanistan or Pakistan to defeat al-Qaeda, replied: ‘that’s not on the table’. Naturally, his rival, Hillary Clinton, seized on this brief departure from the holy writ of US national security policy to chide him, remarking: ‘I don’t believe any president should make any blanket statements with respect to the use or

non-use of nuclear weapons'. Similarly, during the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump, pressed by an interviewer about his willingness to launch a US nuclear attack in the Middle East, declared that he 'would never take any of my cards off the table'.

One of the most chilling aspects of this book is Ellsberg's revelation of how close the world has been —and remains —to nuclear annihilation. Nuclear war, he argues, is 'a catastrophe waiting to happen', and he provides many examples of how nations have been sliding toward it thanks to the growing acceptability of targeting civilian populations, the delegation of launching authority to military officers, the ruthlessness of military officers and other national security officials, false alarms, and unexpected events. During the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, he remarks, the United States and the Soviet Union came within 'a hairsbreadth' of ending world civilization, despite the fact that Khrushchev and Kennedy 'were determined to avoid armed conflict'.

How did this paradoxical situation develop? As Ellsberg explains, the risk of a nuclear war between the superpowers grew exponentially during the Missile Crisis thanks to the fact that a Soviet missile crew, acting on its own authority, destroyed a US U-2 flight over Cuba and that Castro's armed forces, already firing on low-flying US reconnaissance planes, were getting closer to hitting them. Also, although the US government didn't know it, there were 42,000 Soviet troops in Cuba, armed (among other things) with over 100 tactical nuclear weapons, and the Soviet government had agreed to delegate authority to local military commanders to use them to repel a US invasion. The situation was clearly spinning out of control. Khrushchev later recalled: 'a smell of scorching hung in the air'.

Meanwhile, US warships cornered a Soviet submarine in the Caribbean and attempted to force it to surface by bombarding it with depth charges. The submarine's top officers, considering themselves under attack, were cut off from outside communications and unsure whether a US-Soviet war had already begun. Moreover, the submarine's ventilator system had broken down, temperatures in the vessel ranged from 113 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit, and crew began collapsing from the extreme heat and carbon dioxide build-up. Increasingly desperate, the Soviet officers wondered whether they should fight back by firing their nuclear torpedo at the US warships. After a four-hour assault on the submarine — which one Soviet officer later said 'felt like you were sitting in a metal barrel, which somebody is blasting with a sledgehammer' — the exhausted Soviet submarine commander 'became furious' and ordered the nuclear torpedo readied for battle. Justifying the order, another emotional officer cried out:

‘We’re going to blast them now! We will die, but we will sink them all — we will not disgrace our Navy!’ But, as another officer recalled, the submarine’s commander ‘was able to rein in his wrath’ and, after consultation with top officers on board, made the decision to bring the vessel peacefully to the surface. As a result, an almost certain escalation into a full-scale nuclear war was averted — but only narrowly.

And what would the results of a full-scale nuclear war have been at that time? In 1961, Ellsberg discovered that the US Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that 600 million Russians and Chinese would die from a US first strike. In addition, another 100 million or so would die in the East European satellite countries, plus (thanks to the radioactive fallout) up to another 100 million people in the surrounding neutral countries and up to another 100 million in America’s West European NATO allies. Also, of course, there would be a great many millions of additional people killed by the Soviet Union’s nuclear response. Furthermore, as Ellsberg notes, this was a ‘fantastic underestimate’, for it was based on fatalities from nuclear blast and fall-out, and did not include deaths by fire.

Today, of course, the destruction from a full-scale nuclear war would be far greater. The shift in nuclear arsenals from atomic bombs to Hydrogen (H) Bombs (weapons that can be made a thousand times as powerful as the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima) has certainly upped the ante. Moreover scientists have discovered and confirmed the phenomenon of “nuclear winter,” in which the soot and smoke from a large number of nuclear explosions would be lofted into the upper stratosphere. This, in turn, would create global darkness and cold that would destroy the world’s agriculture, thereby leading to massive starvation and the death of nearly every human left alive on earth, along with that of most other large species.

Ellsberg’s conclusion is stark, but follows logically from this evidence

‘Any social system’, he writes, ‘that has created and maintained a Doomsday Machine and has put a trigger to it, including first use of nuclear weapons, in the hands of one human being — . . . still worse in the hands of an unknown number of persons — is in core aspects mad. Ours is such a system. We are in the grip of institutionalized madness.’

Although Ellsberg is pessimistic about the prospects of human survival, he is not without remnants of hope or recommendations for action. ‘The US government,’ he writes, ‘pressed by a popular movement and preferably backed by binding congressional legislation’, should proclaim ‘that there is no “nuclear first-use option” on the bargaining table in our dealings with

. . . any nation.’ Indeed, first use of nuclear weapons is ‘not a legitimate “option” for the United States, Russia, or for any other country under any circumstances.’ Other ‘necessary goals’ include reducing the role of the world’s nuclear weapons to deterrence while securing, as rapidly as possible, the ‘total universal abolition of nuclear weapons’.

Ellsberg’s top priority, though, is the dismantling of the Doomsday Machines of the United States and Russia through drastic reductions in their nuclear arsenals. As he reminds us:

‘No cause, no principle, no considerations of honour or obligation or prestige or maintaining leadership in current alliances — still less, no concern for remaining in office or maintaining a particular power structure, or sustaining jobs, profits, votes — can justify maintaining any risk whatever of causing the near extinction of human and other animal life on this planet.’

Omnicide— whether threatened, prepared, or carried out — ‘cannot be regarded as anything less than criminal, immoral, evil’.

Whether the people of the world will take this message to heart remains uncertain. It’s tempting to ignore it for, like the evidence of human-instigated climate disruption, it necessitates a significant change in behaviour. And it’s sometimes easier to continue a bad habit — even when it leads to harmful consequences — than to face up to the necessity for change.

But, as Ellsberg’s brilliantly written, deeply insightful, and powerful book should convince us, continued preparations for nuclear war seriously threaten the survival of most life on earth. Also, in fact, millions of people in nations around the globe have already spoken out against government plans for nuclear annihilation, demanding, instead, nuclear disarmament. Perhaps, ultimately, humanity will have the wisdom and strength to prevail.

Lawrence S. Wittner

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Cordiality and cunning

Chico Buarque translated by Alison Entrekin, *My German Brother*, Picador, 2018, 200 pages, hardback ISBN 9781509806454, £14.99

Chico Buarque is, above all, a realist and a pragmatist, a master of genres who is at the same time chary of classification. Social responsibility or activism in Brazil, of the kinds engaged in by Chico the singer-songwriter during the military dictatorship (1964-1980) or, more recently, in support of the deposed Lula and the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, are far from the aspirations of any of his fictional protagonists. They are, rather, *malandros*, or practitioners of *jeitinho*, who apply a local cunning to the exigencies of day to day survival, scrabbling for a foothold in the conflicted urban terrain of Rio or Sao Paulo. Chico's anthems have always reverberated at the barricades, in the stadia or during Carnival, providing a camaraderie they acknowledge as temporary like that of 'A Banda', in which, after the samba has passed through the neighbourhood, 'each one [is again] in his corner / in every corner its pain'. They are also part, whether they like it or not, of what Luiz Eduardo Soares, Lula's one time National Secretary for Public Security, decries as the delusory, hedonistic façade of the Brazilian 'Extreme City' [Penguin, 2016] with its hollow claims to 'racial democracy', behind which nightmarish poverty and brutality sprawl.

'I didn't need to visit a favela to write about its people', Chico told the *Financial Times* in 2004: perhaps it's enough that his songs travel there, one commentator glossing this kind of disingenuousness as a 'complex stance toward Brazil's poor, which oscillates between empathetic identification and an almost arch sense of ironic distance' [Caio Camargo]. But in each of the (so far) five novels, however much the displaced *malandros* writhe in the toils of their own self-interest and venality – they all come from aristocratic, affluent or intellectual circles, pedigrees replete with plantation-owners, senators, cosmopolitan or corporate connections, and are as desperate to reclaim some vestige of their former privileges as a Beckettian character is to climb back into his mother's womb – the other reality lamented by Soares keeps breaking through. It may take the form of the many 'Heart of Darkness' moments, ghostly incarnations of collective suffering picked up on the narrator's blunted radar which almost, but never quite, trigger a human response, like the misery of the crop gatherers employed by a local drug lord in *Turbulence*: 'At dusk they

limp up the hillside, the men carrying baskets on their shoulders and the women balancing them on their heads ... I can't work out how many there are, as they're walking in groups and all look equally thin and equally flaccid'. Or of the 'profane fantasies' of the post-colonial mentality, the 100 year old bedridden son of an abolitionist yearning for the mango trees of his childhood and the freed slave climbing there in *Spilt Milk*: 'I got it into my head that I needed to take Balbino up the arse'. Solipsism stalked by atrocity — where in all this, we may ask and are, one suspects, meant to ask, is the real Chico?

My German Brother is the nearest we are likely to come, perhaps, to autobiography. Whereas *Spilt Milk* detailed the rancorous conservatism, xenophobia and arms trading of a baronial line in freefall from the mansions of Batafogo through modest apartments in Tijuca to the tender mercies of a Rio public hospital – Chico's most lurid and audacious social commentary to date – the new novel plunges us into an array of textual games that signal, like the earlier *Budapest*, the author's commitment to postmodern artifice. It's as if *My German Brother* were just one more item amid the Borgesian vastness of Sergio Buarque de Hollander's [sic] library, which incarcerates the great Brazilian sociologist and man of letters (and Chico's real father) and seals him off not only from the tumultuous history of, in this case, Sao Paulo but also of his own family. 'We remain exiles in our own land', Buarque Senior's profoundly influential study *Roots of Brazil* (1936) avowed of the Ibero-American condition in general, an observation that, additionally, might apply to intelligentsias everywhere, whether colonial, post-colonial, or indigenous: here, the lifelong pursuit of a *magnum opus* which would be 'the best book in *tutto el mondo*' is rendered as affectionate comedy but also, with withering scorn, as the cause of his fictional son Ciccio's personal anguish and lack of connection to all social developments or causes, save opportunistically. 'When no-one was around, I'd spend hours sidling along the bookcases; my back brushing from book to book gave me a certain pleasure' – the restlessness of all the *malandros* is repeated here, in the inner sanctum of childhood, as it is by the travelling finger of the mature author which, on page after page and for the duration of the novel, presents to our gaze the assembled works of world literature from *The Golden Bough* and *La Comedie Humaine* to Pasternak, *Ulysses* and W.G. Sebald (one feels in this movement the desire, still incompletely realised more than three decades later, for international recognition expressed by Garcia Marquez's Nobel Prize speech, 'The Solitude of Latin America'). Ciccio's meagre professional survival as a blogger defending his father's

intellectual legacy and a 'social media-based grammar guru' only confirms the dispiriting impression of lives lived as if there were no *hors-texte*.

As the title suggests, however, the whole of *My German Brother* is premised on another order of being, and the seemingly authentic, often handwritten documents woven across its length point to an outcome whereby even tragic Ciccio, but especially Chico, can emerge again into the light of at least a limited historical reality. Chico's belated discovery that Sergio Buarque de Hollanda, wrestling with the initial stages of *The Roots of Brazil* during a prolonged stay in the Berlin of the early 1930s, sired a long lost, unidentified brother, turns what might have been just another privileged picaresque traversal of, mostly, the safer end of the Brazilian cityscape into a slow burning personal epiphany. Nor does Chico forget to remind us, *en route*, of the encircling brutalities of the dictatorship, the street killings and torture of left wing dissent or the parallels with Nazism, in images of, as always, harrowing viscerality – however fleetingly glimpsed. The library is itself subjected to violent, destructive incursions, and infested from the outset with cockroaches: 'four – lay writhing, belly-up ... in the Polish gas chambers people had died gasping just like that, in the hope of finding a little oxygen above the insecticide'. But the author's playfulness, even in such circumstances, is irrepressible: a police inspector named 'Jorge Borges' flicks through a first edition of *El Aleph* with 'a stubby, dirty-nailed thumb', high and low castes parading their mutual disdain as the ransacking of the postmodern citadel proceeds. Miraculously, in the final chapter, it's Chico, not Ciccio, who steps forward *in propria persona* and out of the fictional narrative into the Berlin of 2013, the textual games cease, and the appalling modern histories of two nations drop away. In their place we seem to witness, poignantly, an enactment of the emotional 'cordiality' identified by Buarque Senior as the defining characteristic of Brazilian social behaviour, for good or ill, but here exhibited in the simple good will, compassion and practical involvement with which the citizens of the former Reich surround the author and carry him to his goal.

Stephen Winfield

The Red Decade

Richard Vinen, *The Long '68: Radical Protest and Its Enemies*, Allen Lane, 2018, 446 pages, hardback ISBN 9780241343425, £20

In 1971, Allen Lane the Penguin Press published *Prevent the Crime of Silence*, which had the lengthy sub-title, *Reports from the sessions of the International War Crimes Tribunal, founded by Bertrand Russell*. Noam Chomsky contributed a Foreword and additional chapter, 'After Pinkville', to this notable volume on Vietnam, edited by Ken Coates, Peter Limquenco and Peter Weiss. In November 1966 in London, Russell had concluded his address to the first meeting of the members of the War Crimes Tribunal with the words 'may this Tribunal prevent the crime of silence'. Jean-Paul Sartre was to preside at the two public sessions in Sweden and Denmark, alongside Vladimir Dedijer. Tribunal members included the writer James Baldwin, the lawyer Lelio Basso, and writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, among activists from a number of countries.

In 1968 in the United States, O'Hare Books of New Jersey had already published *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the Russell International War Crimes Tribunal*, edited by John Duffett.

Neither Russell nor the War Crimes Tribunal figure in Richard Vinen's *The Long '68*, which has the curious sub-title *Radical protest and its enemies*. Curious because 'enemies' seems to overstate Vinen's softly spoken and generally broad-brush and wide-ranging approach to what proved to be the 'red decade', which Coates and others eagerly anticipated when they gathered as Labour Students in the late 1950s. Vinen's 'Brief Chronology' begins in April 1960 with the foundation of the Parti Socialiste Unifié in France, concluding in May 2017 with Emmanuel Macron's election as President of France, supported by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, tagged as 'Danny the Red' in the 1960s. Understandably, Vinen has a particular emphasis on the events in Paris of May and June 1968, whilst not neglecting what was happening elsewhere in France. The United States, West Germany and Britain also fall within his purview.

In his chapter entitled 'Workers', Vinen mentions that Ken Coates founded the Institute for Workers' Control in 1968. Certainly, the IWC was constituted with its council during that year, 'with the blessing of Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones, leaders of the Engineers and Transport Workers respectively', as Ken wrote in *Workers' Control: Another world is possible* (Spokesman, 2003). But the IWC had a long prehistory, stretching back to

1963, with five national conferences bringing together shop stewards, community activists and adult educators such as Michael Barratt Brown, Ken Coates and Tony Topham. 'Most of these people came from the political left, but not all', wrote Coates, adding 'there was a strong Young Liberal input from some of the earliest conferences, and older members soon joined in'. Vinen notes Young Liberal participation.

Vinen's paragraph on Coates and the IWC is preceded by one on *autogestion*, which he translates as 'self-management'. 'The word could be applied to almost any context in which people can be seen as taking control of their own lives', comments Vinen. In the early 1950s, as a young miner, Ken Coates's own interest in self-management manifested in his support for Yugoslavia's innovations in that direction, as President Tito and Federal Yugoslavia took their distance from the Soviet Union under Stalin. This and, in 1952, the show trials and executions of Joseph Slansky and others in Czechoslovakia, thought to be sympathetic to Tito, led to Ken's departure from the Communist Party. Viner labels Ken 'Trotskyist'. Ken certainly knew all the 'groupuscules' and many of their members; the numbers were not large. However, his socialism was rooted in the quest for a wider democracy in many aspects of life, which is where he found common ground with Bertrand Russell, with whom he worked from 1965 until Russell's death in 1970. Thereafter, Ken continued his democratic quest through the IWC and the Russell Foundation, as recounted in long interviews with George Lambie prior to his death in 2010 (see *Spokesman 116*).

Tony Simpson