

Reviews

Eric

Richard J. Evans, *Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History*, Little, Brown, 2019, 798 pages, hardback ISBN9781408707418, £35

Hobsbawm always insisted on ‘Eric’, so Eric he will be here.

This is something of a departure for Evans, best known for his many books on Germany and Nazism, also for lethal testimony in the David Irving-Deborah Lipstadt trial. My uncorrected proof copy lacks both illustrations and bibliography. The latter can be excavated from the 81 pages of endnotes, meticulously source-documented plus extra information supplementary to the main narrative. The excellent 36-page Index (eight devoted to Eric) comports a list of his books.

Long life (95 years), so long book. Much value accrues from use of Eric’s unpublished Diaries (mainly in German) and his multi-generic fugitive pieces. Complementary is Eric’s memoir, *Interesting Times*, dubbed (page ix) by Stefan Collini as ‘that interesting hybrid, an impersonal autobiography’.

This doorstopper is friendly (the two were well acquainted) but not a hagiography; Eric gets his fair share of flak, personal and political. Book-ended by provocative Preface and Conclusion, the ten, chronologically-arranged chapters come with nifty titles that shape a mini-biography: The English Boy; Ugly as Sin, but a Mind; A Freshman Who Knows About Everything; A Left-wing Intellectual in the English Army; Outsider in the Movement; A Dangerous Character; Paperback Writer (shared with the Beatles – Eric, though, detested all pop music); Intellectual Guru; Jeremiah; National Treasure.

Eric had a knack for chronological coincidences. Born 1917 (in Alexandria), he arrived in Berlin in 1931, saw the red light (had a brush with Stormtroopers), and made for England in 1933. Complex Jewish family (Evans disentangles well), complex schoolings in Vienna (already toxic with anti-Semitism), England (‘dull’), and Berlin (his favourite: stimulating, classically-inclined and well-informed-in-Marxism teachers).

His ugliness evokes Sartre’s (whom he knew and liked), made him diffident with women, to whom he came late. Evans even suggests Marxism was his sex substitute (page 75). His first marriage was a disaster, his second a triumph (wife Marlene a powerhouse in her own right), with Eric, the perfect husband and father, henceforth living in marital bliss.

Hard to believe (same with Marx) he ever took the *Manifesto's* proposed abolition of family seriously. Between the two, Eric had a surprising liaison with a drug-addicted young prostitute. Prime attraction, erotic services apart, was her love of jazz, Eric's other passion.

Tartly remarking he knew more about it than *Observer* guru Kingsley Amis (not applicable to fellow aficionado Philip Larkin), Eric became the *New Statesman's* jazz critic, the columns eventually published in book form under the name of Francis Newton, a communist drummer who had played on Billy Holiday's haunting *Strange Fruit* (about a lynching), whom Eric worshipped, writing a beautiful tribute after her death and hanging a photograph as sole mural decoration in his study.

Jazz was a maverick communist enthusiasm. In the Soviet Union (dutifully followed by the Communist Party of Great Britain), this music was routinely denounced as 'degenerate' and 'epileptic'; cf. Frederick Starr's *Jazz in the Soviet Union* (1983; rev. 2004). Eric explained his musical love affair in the *London Review of Books* (27 May 2010).

At Cambridge, start of a lifelong connection, he was a brilliant undergraduate (talent-spotted for different reasons by Noel Annan and James Klugmann), researcher (his work initially disliked by Postan and Tawney – there'd be eventual reconciliations), and lecturer. Election to The Apostles brought contact with Burgess and Blunt – both doubtless enjoyed Annan's paper on buggery more than Eric, but no evidence of complicity in their espionage. British (later also American) Intelligence was constantly sniffing around him, but they had nothing to fear. Eric was the classic academic armchair revolutionary. In the War, spent on educational work around England, he saw no action and was one of few not to volunteer for a dangerous Norwegian mission. Apart from some anti-Vietnam War demonstrating, he was no street fighter, nor did he do any of the routine CPGB chores (eg selling the *Daily Worker*). Typically, Intelligence missed the big fish ('Cambridge Five'), whilst Eric was farcically listed as a 'Dutch Jew' (page 702 note 187).

Post-war, Eric's academic star blazed ever brighter. He alternated between Cambridge and Birkbeck College, with a stream of lecture tours and visiting appointments in America and around the world, showing special affection for India and, naturally, Cuba. Hailed everywhere as a spellbinding lecturer and affable guest, his many books won plaudits even from anti-Marxists. Multifarious in interests and writing, Eric called himself primarily an economic historian. He singled out *Primitive Rebels* as his personal favourite – see my 'Ancient Socialism' (*Spokesman* 112, 2010) for his highlighting of revolutionary cobblers, whose modern loss of

zeal he comically lamented. Unlike Evans, I greatly like his final work, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism* (2011) – see my lengthy review article on the ReadySteadyBook website (UK).

One criticism from all sides was Eric's neglect of nationalism. He eventually broke down and published *Nations and Nationalism*, deprecating all such parochial ideologies.

Another topic he studiously avoided was the Holocaust – 'not interested in the Shoah,' a Jewish relative disclosed. Eric's view seems to have been that it was one of many interconnected tragedies, not to be segregated for particular treatment.

Of course, *the* question always aimed at Eric was why stay in the CPGB after the 1956 Khrushchev denunciation of Stalin? When faced with this by Sue Lawley on *Desert Island Discs*, he feebly replied, 'we didn't know'. He'd only needed to ask Malcolm Muggeridge. Davenport-Hines quotes Eric's telling late-in-life admission that 'in early youth' he had developed 'a facility for deleting unpleasant or unacceptable data'.

In the 1930s, Eric had defended the show-trials, employing the standard 'Trotskyite wrecker' slur. He similarly sought to excuse the 1956/68 invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, he dismissed Stalin's writings as 'dull', preferring the 'cheeriness' inspired in him by Lenin (surely a unique reaction), and had increasingly set himself at odds with such CPGB luminaries as John Gollan and George Matthews.

Why did the CPGB not expel Eric? He did no Party chores, and was routinely disparaged as a mere 'intellectual'. But the Party brass wanted to capitalize on his British and international fame (and fortune), so essentially put him in the Brecht/Yevtushenko category of 'licensed dissident'.

Eric's answer was obvious. Better to stay and work for changes within than rail uselessly from outside. One recalls US President Johnson's 'tent-pissing' explanation for re-appointing J. Edgar Hoover. *En passant*, one matter seemingly passed over by Evans is Eric's reaction to the Party's controversial 1951 manifesto *The British Way to Socialism*, discarding revolution for the ballot box. Edward Upward left in disgust (cf. my remarks in *Spokesman* 127, 2015.)

Eric had always denigrated Trotsky and followers, once branding them 'nightmarish'. Yet, had he resigned, might he have been seduced by Gerry Healey into the Trotskyite wasteland? If so, what? Think of Peter Fryer ...

Of special interest to *Spokesman* readers is Eric's relationship to Ken Coates. In the *New Statesman* (November 1973) he praised Ken as 'the most under-rated political analyst among British Marxists today'. A decade later (*New Left Review*, January-February 1982), in his 'The Choices

Before Labour', Ken combined similar eulogies of Eric with sharp criticism of his views on Trade Unions. In a Diary entry for 7 November 1982, Tony Benn recorded Ken's reaction to Eric at a conference in Yugoslavia as becoming a centrist, flirting with the Social Democrat likes of Sue Slipman and company.

I could have filled this entire *Spokesman* issue with discussion of the myriad minutiae provided by Evans – by the end, I had amassed 50 pages of notes. Not many books can be described as, or remain, definitive. But, it is hard to imagine anyone improving on this one.

CODA. Several websites give lists of Eric's aphorisms. Apart from his characterization of Blair as 'Thatcher in trousers', here's my favourite:

'As the global expansion of Indian and Chinese restaurants suggests, xenophobia is directed against foreign people, not foreign cultural imports.'

Looking around Britain today, who could disagree?

Barry Baldwin

Highlighting the weaknesses

Lev Ozerov, *Portraits Without Frames*, Editors Robert Chandler and Boris Dralyuk, Granta 2019, 256 pages, ISBN 9781783784714, £14.99

The Master of Revels in Pushkin's 'little tragedy' *A Feast in Time of Plague* (1830) undergoes, in the space of a few pages, and with a speed and deftness rivalling anything in Ozerov's *Portraits*, a complex transformation: from indomitable celebrant of the human capacity to defy crushing circumstance – the death carts pass by even as he rhapsodises the eternalising power of suffering – to one who, capsized by grief at the loss of his loved ones, 'remains, lost in thought'. His thought, our thought – Pushkin refuses to clarify or simplify the impact experience, impulse and emotion have had. But the Master's earlier Hymn ['Within each breath of death / lives joy, lives secret joy / for mortal hearts, a pledge / perhaps, of immortality, / and blessed is he who, storm-tossed, / can see and seize this joy'] has acquired in the light of that final image an almost fatuous edge, just as, a century later and in the icy grip of the Stalinist winter, the hollowness of the partygoers' hurrahs becomes in Akhmatova's *Voronezh* 'the poplars / rattle, like glasses ringing in a toast' while 'in the exiled

poet's hideaway / the muse and terror fight their endless fight / throughout the night. / So dark a night will never see the day'. To pass from the Shakespearean pathos with which Akhmatova evokes the casual extermination of Osip Mandelstam (and simultaneously, the ongoing, decades-long assault on generations of the Soviet cultural elite), to the fifty vignettes that make up Ozerov's reconstruction in the 1990s of all that had been lost and needed, in his view, to be redeemed, is to be aware of a savage irony attending the collection's innocuous-sounding title: what other gallery of portraits in the history of literature or its sister arts could be more 'framed' by the cyclone of social and ideological convulsion?

Ozerov neither avoids nor dwells upon the horror. His focus, rather, like Pushkin's treatment of the Master, and as he avows in the portrait of Leyb Kvitko, one of thirteen members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee who perished during the 'Night of the Murdered Poets', August 12 1952, is on selfhood, on what happens when each of his subjects is drawn forward into the spotlight, however fleetingly, *in propria persona*: 'a human being is an inexhaustible subject, / especially if his life / has been cut short'. The tributes to Kvitko and two further victims, Dovid Hofshhteyn and Peretz Markish, carry one may argue – and might anticipate, from a fellow Jewish-Ukrainian — an additional weight of identification, affection, visceral outrage, Hofshhteyn "the mildest man I ever knew", the "wild scream ... In a voice not her own" of Esther Markish when the KGB offer to repay her for her dead husband's gold crowns. But one must look elsewhere for evidence of Ozerov's readiness to engage directly and unflinchingly with historical atrocity, to the topographical precision, eyewitness veracity and emotional power of his *Babi Yar* [1944-5], 'the longest Russian-language Shoah poem written and published in Stalin's time' [Maxim D. Shrayer]. 'Pleading, here at this place I stand. / If my mind can endure the violence, / I will hear what you have to say, land – / Break your silence.'

Joseph Brodsky characterises the Soviet interregnum as a dream of the rule of facelessness – 'bland, grey, undistinguished faces: they look like everyone else, which gives them an almost underground air; they are similar as blades of grass' – over ever-expanding numbers of the faceless – 'the depersonalisation and bureaucratization of everybody alive' [*On Tyranny*, 1980]. Instead, one by one, the stars of Ozerov's literary and artistic pantheon are glimpsed or remembered in scenes of trenchant self-revelation, furtive disclosure, or more rarely, like novelist Konstantin Paustovsky confronting Khrushchev's acolytes in the Writers' Union, vehement repudiation of the 'Dense-packed rows / of clean shaven faces

... he just pushed a boulder from his soul / and rolled it away'. There are instances where fascination with the aura of creative or intellectual pre-eminence, so beloved of the younger Ozerov – 'I listened to their [the architect Burov and formalist critic Shklovsky's] conversations / like a pre-schooler... spool after spool of unforgettable talk. / I'd won a lottery' – and never quite relinquished by his older self, manage to momentarily obliterate any more measured account of an individual's essential, perhaps contradictory humanity, but they are few and far between. The portrait of Burov is unremittingly glamorous ['He did nothing small / or petty, his whole life a grand / expenditure of time and energy. / Work, cognac, wives' ...], and unremittingly satirical, but the explosive, visionary energy ['his boldness, his inborn joy / and desire for perfection'] and an instance of personal courage silence all criticism. Emil Gilels' tight-lipped acquiescence in his own exploitation, on the other hand, epitomised by a demeaning personal endorsement from Stalin, robs the sonic power of his pianism – 'an unbridled force of nature' – of some of its grandeur. But it's the all-but-invisible, all-but-indefinable inner torment of Gilels, caught listening to unprogrammable Bach in a secluded corner of Riga Cathedral, not Burov's epic self-sufficiency, that elicits Ozerov's compassion and lends itself more naturally to the pattern and method of these poems – self-effacement, ingratiation even, their author's extraordinary ubiquity, empathy or comradeship, and permanently raised antennae, sensitive to every chance encounter, gesture or utterance that might illuminate a given individual. How *did* he, one wonders, gain access to so many perilous confidences, in a society where, as Figes' *The Whisperers* has shown, trust had all but evaporated? Why is it to Ozerov the historian Irakly Andronikov chooses to unburden himself of the knowledge, on 5 March 1953, that not only Stalin but also Prokofiev has died? – 'I told you, / but, please, don't / tell anyone else'... Gilels stealing out from under the organ loft recalls the temporarily exiled Pasternak outside Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Georgia, after a moment of private communion with the eleventh century, but whereas Pasternak recoils like a startled deer caught in someone's headlights when recognised by passers-by and bolts for cover, writes Ozerov, 'like Pushkin's Eugene / from the Bronze Horseman', Gilels 'looked around carefully, / saw me, and came up to me'.

The volume as edited closes with a rare exception to the round of celebrities: Ozerov's father. His gentle reproof 'when eyes like yours / gaze at this world's iron contours, / those contours blur and soften / into boughs of lilacs' suggests perhaps part of the reason Ozerov was able to provide such a goldmine of minute observation, here lovingly transcribed

by the co-translators in an effort, not unlike Ozerov's own, to rescue the brilliant multi-facetedness of Soviet culture from the neglect and, frequently, opprobrium it has faced not just in its own land but also in the English-speaking world. The images solicit our attention tenderly and, except in extreme cases, non-judgementally, in a range of tones that run from unabashed candour [Akhmatova: 'A loose-fitting robe, or a housecoat / or, rather, a coverall / disguises her corpulence – / a gift of the prison queues'] to wild hilarity [Khachaturian returning humiliated from an abortive photo shoot with Salvador Dali: 'It is said that this episode / cooled the composer's ardour: / he went less often on tour / to dodgy venues']. In the final analysis, however, the murderous scythe still hangs in the air, whatever ingenuities a person adopts to evade it: one thinks of the early death of Mikhail Zoshchenko, alluded to by Ozerov, despite all the ironic games or narrative subterfuges that enabled his satires to reach their targets; or the decades-long, fulminating despair as Ozerov characterises it of Yuri Olesha, "unwanted writer", for refusing to disown the anarchic subversion of his early novella *Envy*. There are countless examples here. The wielders of the scythe are less often glimpsed, or pursued into their state-sanctioned lairs: Zelinsky, Kovpak, Zhdanov, Fadeyev. The latter's suicide during the Khrushchev thaw as a Stalin henchman and proponent of *Zhdanovschina* is the occasion for one of the most cautiously ambivalent portraits in the whole collection: 'Poor Sasha! ... It's hard to write about Fadeyev'. One only has to compare this to Korney Chukovsky's 'Conscientious, talented, and sensitive as he was, he was floundering in oozy, putrid mud and drowning his conscience in wine' to sense the complexity of Ozerov's entirely characteristic restraint. Interestingly, Fadeyev is the one writer from *Portraits* whose name also appears on the list drawn up by the Russian Ministry of Education in response to Vladimir Putin's initiative, during the 2012 election campaign, calling for

'a canon of 100 Russian books that every school leaver will be required to read at home ... State policy with regard to culture must provide appropriate guidelines ... The government should also support literature because it always makes the most accurate diagnosis of society's condition and highlights its weaknesses.'

Stephen Winfield

Academe politics

Richard Clogg, *Greek To Me: A Memoir of Academic Life*, I.B.Tauris, 2018, 368 pages, hardback ISBN 9781784539887, £55.00

Along with C. M. Woodhouse (deceased), Richard Clogg is the pre-eminent British historian of modern Greek history, attested by his many books and countless articles (eg ‘Greek-Bashing,’ *London Review of Books*, 18 August 1994), written during an often fraught academic career at Edinburgh, King’s College London, and St. Antony’s College Oxford.

Seven lengthy chapters, book-ended by Introduction and Epilogue, with 25 black and white illustrations, a mere two pages of end-notes, no bibliography, serviceable index, composed in Clogg’s lucid prose, unclogged by jargon for which he shows a healthy contempt extending to ‘Political Correctness’, richly laced with acerbic humour encompassing a multiplicity of targets personal and institutional.

As with all such memoirs, *Greek To Me* is inevitably self-serving apropos of Clogg’s deep and passionate involvement in academic and political controversies, with much concomitant paying-off of old scores. This evokes the much quoted ‘academic politics are so vicious because the stakes are so low,’ usually attributed to Henry Kissinger, though Clogg (p. 4) credits Californian politico Jesse Unruh.

It is also one of the most conceited (with a degree of concomitant persecution-mania) books I’ve read, Clogg never missing a chance to quote favourable remarks and reviews at considerable length. Some may object to his disobliging remarks on female appearances, for instance (p. 51) that of Byzantinist Joan Hussey as ‘frumpish and portly’.

Choice comic moments alleviate. Examples: Byzantinist R. M. Dawkins cackling from treetop; Birmingham classical professor failing to recognize a departmental colleague; American Judith Hallett who reported two rivals to the FBI as possible ‘Unabomber’ suspects — Clogg drily remarks, ‘see how these classicists love one another’ (Ahem!); Romanians relishing the chance to greet Michael Foot with ‘Foot-Ceausescu’ shouts, playing on their word ‘Fut’ (= ‘Fuck’); Ceausescu’s labrador (a gift from Liberal David Steel) with its military rank (Colonel), private food-taster, and monthly cash allowances. Other light moments include Arthur Scargill in Bulgaria complaining of poor restaurant service, ‘if this is communism you can stuff it’; and the CIA’s proposal to use killer mosquitoes in

Afghanistan — how did they distinguish friend from foe?

Greece is not Clogg's unique focus. There is a good deal on Romania, jubilantly hailing the Ceausescus' fall (their summary execution was broadcast on television on Christmas Day 1989), rightly excoriating British cuddling up to them, especially fierce on blithe acceptance of Elena the pseudo-scientist, her 'thesis' published by (Clogg's words) that other con artist, pseudo-Labour Robert Maxwell. Clogg also recounts a stint on building one of Enver Hoxha's new railways in Albania with student 'volunteers'.

For present purposes, chapters 2 and 3 are the most pertinent, respectively dealing with the 'Ruritanian' Greek Colonels' 1967-74 darkly-farcical regime and the troubles (largely manufactured by other personal and political vested interests, both British and Greek) Clogg encountered (and overcame) in his efforts to write a disinterested history of the *SOE* (Special Operations Executive — Clogg rightly laughing at this pompous title).

Clogg worked tirelessly to expose and undermine the junta, both organizationally and through multitudinous articles and speeches, working with many British and Greek fellow-opponents, ranging from Eleni Vlachou, editor of Greece's best newspaper *Kathimerini*, to *Private Eye*'s Paul Foot.

There was also a Swiftian battle of the books, with Clogg fiercely reviewing such pro-Colonels apologias as David Holden's (unindexed) *Greece Without Columns* and Kenneth Young's *The Greek Passion*. He does admit, though, that Classicist-reviewer Peter Green had a point in complaining about unique worldwide condemnation of the junta. People do have selective consciences. I think of the many present evils which elicit no street demonstrations.

The Labour Party does not come out of this well. MP Francis Noel-Baker cuddled up to the junta to protect his Greek properties. Another, Gordon Bagier, took cash retainers to provide favourable public relations. There's documentary evidence of the Government's friendly overtures to the military regime, plus Harold Wilson's cognate breezy dismissal of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia as 'something to forgive and forget'.

I regret that leading archaeologist Spyridon Marinatos eagerly embraced the Colonels. Nemesis was quick — he was crushed to death during excavations by a collapsing wall.

Clogg (pages 91-94) could/should have said more about the murder of journalist Ann Chapman. The British Government refused to investigate. Turkish Intelligence (1978) maintained she was killed by the Greek Secret

Service at the CIA's behest. In the same year, Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko described her death as 'sinister'. The man convicted of her rape and murder was released in 1983, declared innocent. For detailed investigation, see David Cade's *Athens — the Truth: Searching for Manos, Just Before the Bubble Burst* (2013, especially pages 154-55).

Ironic note: the Colonels subverted democracy. Their ancient Athenian equivalents twice rescued it from repressive oligarchies.

After a rehearsal of the obstacles placed in the way of his *SOE* history, Clogg continues with an updated re-run of his controversial *Politics and the Academy: Arnold Toynbee and the Koraeas Chair*, a grisly account of Toynbee's unseating and consequent 'unperson' relegation in official King's College histories. This chair was founded by a man who said reading Byzantine literature gave him gout. Toynbee owed his elevation to logrolling by Regius Professor of Greek, Gilbert Murray, his teacher and father-in-law. But he made the fatal mistake in Hellenic eyes by saying the Greeks were no better than the Turks in 1922 wartime atrocities. The consequent Greek vendetta against him was abetted by T. S. Eliot who dubbed Toynbee 'a noxious humanitarian'.

After Toynbee's dethroning, a battle-royal broke out between Clogg and the top Byzantinists, both sides wanting the Chair to protect their academic fiefdoms. Clogg, writing as the loser, discharges both barrels at rival luminaries. I know/knew all these personally, whereas I've never met Clogg.

After remarking that John le Carré alluded to St. Antony's as a training ground for spies, Clogg's *envoi* consists of printing his valedictory speech (its praise of *Lucky Jim* is a clear message) and laments over how cash-strapped universities increasingly truckle to cash blandishments from business, industry, and politicians, instancing Cambridge's Margaret Thatcher Professorship of Enterprise Studies — obviously wouldn't be Oxford. He perhaps overstates his case, but there is a case to be overstated — Clogg's quotation (page 272) of an unnamed American academic: 'only trouble with tainted money is that there t'aint enough of it'.

This *Memoir* is a thumping good read. According to personal prejudice and taste, it will elicit contrary views of Clogg. On the one hand, his anti-Colonels crusade was admirable, whilst in modern Greek history he is an unquestionable superstar. On the other, his tone is often that of a rancid, grudge-holding loser of sectarian battles. His own words, 'a dispiriting tale of academic intrigue', may say it all. I have never moved in high business or political circles, but after 50-some years graft in universities, I can vouchsafe the truth of the academic trenches. The stakes were not always trivial but, overall, Kissinger/Unruh was right.

Barry Baldwin

Libya

Rob Weighill and Florence Gaub, *The Cauldron – NATO’s Campaign in Libya*, Hurst and Company, 2018, 388 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849048828, £40

To read and understand how these multi-national projects and operations work, especially on the scale of mega-organizations like NATO and the UN, is fascinating and disturbing at the same time. I confess the military-security background of the authors and the recommendation by Peter Hain put me on the alert. And I was right to be wary – with some reservations because this is really a specialist read, or works if it is taken as such.

‘Chaos’ rather than ‘Cauldron’ would have perhaps been a better title because you get little idea of the violence on the ground – it is a little like watching all those Wrens pushing counters on a large table in front of serious men in blue to describe the blood, fear and fury of a battle in the air as so often seen in World War Two movies. Yet, the sense of chaos is palpable in the corridors of power, trying to coordinate not only NATO and the UN but also The League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and The African Union, along with contending political agendas, not to speak of politicians’ egos. For a start, there was basic ignorance about Libya and confusion about Gaddafi himself. First, he had been the bad guy, the backer of terrorism (responsible for the Lockerbie plane bombing, though surely there are still unanswered questions about that) and then he was a good guy entertaining the likes of Sarkozy and Blair and giving up his weapons of mass destruction – a lesson surely not lost on Rocket Man. But when the Arab Spring back-footed Gaddafi, NATO was equally unprepared, with staff shortages and vital officers on leave or on training exercises. NATO was under American command but the commander was busy with American forces, so it fell to a Canadian, Charles Bouchard, who is one of the few to come out of this sorry business with any credit, sticking to the remit of UN resolutions and resisting as far as possible the pressures of politicians to get tougher and rougher. That happened anyway – it was all supposed to start nice and gentle, to prevent a Rwanda-type slaughter, though there is little evidence that there was any such danger. However, it was claimed, the motive was ‘humanitarian’, to protect civilians. Who these civilians were is somewhat vague because where did the opposition come from if not from ‘ordinary people’? There were plenty of them, right enough, but Al-Qaeda/ Nusra inspired groups,

seeing a golden opportunity, quickly moved in. And surely Iraq should have made the powers-that-be wary of oppositions in exile, not necessarily brave fighters for their country's freedom, but then, of course, the powers-that-be probably knew exactly what they were doing; plenty of experience, after all.

So a free-fly zone and an arms embargo were initiated. How this was interpreted varied from so much 'humanitarianism' that it was like trying to fight a war without anyone getting hurt to heavy violence. What if you kill civilians you are supposed to be protecting if it will later prevent the greater loss of civilian lives? Do you only bomb armaments factories or bomb the hell out of everything – infrastructure and transport and everything that might facilitate their movement and the arming of the enemy? And there you have it, like it or not, things escalate and get out of hand and, for all the stated good intentions of not taking sides, NATO ends up backing one side. And 'Regime Change', which is supposed to be off the menu, is suddenly back on it. The rebels were in control of the air and, against all the stated rules, arms were run to them; furthermore, there were 'boots on the ground' – page 207 refers to 'the continued presence of advisers on the ground'. We have all heard that one before; the question is how many advisers do you have to have before you start calling them 'troops' or 'soldiers'.

The aftermath of Gaddafi's downfall is well known from his obscene death and gloating laughter of Hillary Clinton, to the splits which quickly appeared between members of the National Transitional Council and the countries which had originally supported and/or recognized it, not to mention the appalling levels of violence ever since. *The Cauldron*, in its conclusion, touches on all this and does not deny NATO's mistakes and faults, but its authors essentially support and believe in the operation. For all the research (and of its 388 pages, 131 are Notes, Bibliography and Index) the pro-Western tone is unmistakable: Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, 'fumes' and Saif al-Islam, one of Gaddafi's sons, calls the International Criminal Court a 'Mickey Mouse court'. The ICC's prosecutor said he had 'direct evidence' that he, his father and brother-in-law had 'formed an inner circle that crushed peaceful demonstrations and ordered the use of live ammunition and heavy weapons against protesters'. They may or may not have done so, but Israel anyone? One can never escape the feeling that double standards are applied along with a good dose of hypocrisy: one rule for them, another for us; we always behave honourably, 'they' always behave badly – except they don't always. Early on, the authors write,

‘The [Libyan] state invested heavily in infrastructure and welfare; literacy rates rose up to 90% ... health care was free and housing was heavily subsidised. Libya improved on most good governance criteria – such as the rule of law, regulatory quality, corruption control ...’

Quite an achievement by any standard but probably not ‘in our interests’ and, indeed, Professor Horace Campbell of Syracuse University says the real motive was to cause instability in the region rather than prevent it. This may be difficult for the average consumer of British and American popular media to accept or understand.

I watched the whole business unfold on Hugo Chavez’s Telesur, always quickly dismissed as propaganda, which it is, but no more so and probably less when it comes to reporting on international affairs than the BBC or CNN. (Tariq Ali had his own excellent weekly programme, too.) Hugo Chavez hated the Americans and with good reason (they tried to regime-change him) and offered Gaddafi refuge in Venezuela. Chavez was then participating in a kind of Latin American ‘Arab Spring’, with Rafael Corea of Ecuador, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Lula and Dilma of Brazil, the Castros in Cuba, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the Kirchners in Argentina, even Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia, the once hard-line minister of war under the corrupt and murderous Uribe, who was negotiating with the FARC. Every single Latin American country and many other countries on other continents well know that the Americans (and the French and the British) have *never* acted on a political level out of ‘humanitarian’ motives, rather they have supported and bought to power dictators far worse than Gaddafi whose human rights records were/are far worse than his.

One final word on this interesting but very flawed book: there are a number of misprints that need to be corrected for future editions; a few more detailed maps would have been useful; and the editors need to get their *Thesaurus* out – I lost count of the times the phrase ‘pushed back’ was used in the sense of ‘disagreed’ rather than military resistance.

Nigel Potter

Hugo Blanco

Hugo Blanco, *We the Indians – The Indigenous peoples of Peru and the struggle for land*, with a foreword by Eduardo Galeano, Merlin Press, 2018, 198 pages, paperback ISBN 978850367386 £15.99

Derek Wall, *Hugo Blanco – A revolutionary for life*, Merlin Press, 2018, 144 pages, paperback ISBN 9780850367485, £14.99

We the Indians improves as it goes along. Hugo Blanco's own political vision develops and he becomes more 'Indian', his early Trotskyism broadens into eco-revolution, and the peasant and countryside are as important as the urban, industrialised working class. This is a big shift. If it is right and proper to demand that workers in sweatshops be allowed the right to unionise, or to mourn the loss of community when a coalmine or steelworks closes down, it is surely necessary to understand that working in a sweatshop or down a mine or in a steelworks in no way represents 'the good life'. The right to work is all very well but what kind of work are we talking about? Is it dangerous and dirty? Is it really necessary (something that satisfies basic human needs?) or does it destroy the human spirit? The 'lazy' life of the 'primitive' is to the unprejudiced eye often much more civilised and enjoyable than the lives of what Thoreau called 'lives of quiet desperation'. Our own consumer societies are not happy ones.

Much of this is described in Derek Wall's biography of Blanco, which is by far the better read. It is something of a hagiography, the great revolutionary who can do no wrong in his ceaseless search for social justice, but it gives a much better idea of the man's dedicated and often dangerous struggle. Hugo Blanco has many more than the cat's proverbial nine lives and his survival does seem extraordinary. After all, it is not difficult to kill an activist: ride up on a motorbike, pillion passenger with gun ready, bang-bang you're dead, and roar away. The thing is the Peruvian regimes were, for all their atrocities, never 100% evil. There were a few honest judges and even police chiefs sympathetic to the aims of the revolutionaries, and it's made very clear that national and international solidarity did and does or can make a huge difference. Some regimes even had left leanings (Juan Velasco's) but Hugo Blanco opposed them as well and, in Velasco's case, lost the support even of the Cubans who supported Velasco.

Hugo Blanco did become a more conventional politician for short

periods, when he admits to strategic and tactical errors, but he was never comfortable in such roles. He is a born oppositionist, and one wonders whether he could ever handle the responsibilities of power. Deals and compromises have to be made, and it can be difficult to find the balance between doing that and selling out revolutionary principles. Perhaps people like Blanco in permanent opposition are necessary as watchdogs. He was on the death lists of Fujimori's dictatorship and the Shining Path revolutionaries, whom Blanco likened to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

With his growing admiration and respect for the 'Indian Way of Life', Blanco would likely argue that power politics as we know them are unnecessary. He rejects what we call 'democracies' as being nothing of the kind, but a different version of the old game of elites bossing the plebs about. They have all the power and it takes a hell of an effort to break it. Perhaps it is only to be expected that, having devoted his whole life to revolutionary change, Blanco sees some improvement and progress, but I think he is overly optimistic here. The plight of the Indians everywhere throughout the American continent remains dire. Even sincere and honest indigenous leaders such as Evo Morales of Bolivia are forced to continue with the rape of Mother Earth in the teeth of indigenous opposition by encouraging and permitting mining interests to have their way for 'the sake of the economy'. It is true that the beginning of this century saw some real solidarity in Central and South America against the power of the world's biggest rogue state, the USA: the Kirchners in Argentina, Chavez in Venezuela, Correa in Ecuador, Lula and Dilma in Brazil, Morales in Bolivia, Mujica in Uruguay, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the Castros in Cuba, but that movement is now in disarray.

The 'Indian Vision' described by both authors is perhaps the only real alternative we have. It's a pipe dream, one is accused of naivety even contemplating it, and it also has to be asked, 'what is the Indian Vision?' The Indians come in all shapes and sizes; some were as awful as any of their conquerors and oppressors. Even the authors admit that the Incas had their faults while denying they had an 'empire'. It is difficult to know what else to call the Inca 'empire', even if it was more benevolent than most. Indeed, much of the success of the *conquistadores* was due to the support they received from other tribes that hated the Aztecs so much. The Mayan 'civilisation' collapsed long before the arrival of the Spanish, probably because of environmental abuse and because 'the People' got so bloody tired of building all those pyramids for priests, princes and kings, not to mention their own internal wars.

That a non-Indian such as Hugo Blanco has listened to and acted on

such a message is inspiring. I would like to have learned more about him though. There is a photo of him, age 80 years, with his six adult children, all smiling. What was the price they all paid for his activism, his long absences in exile and prison? What makes such a man tick? It's not just a gossipy interest because, in true Indian fashion, you cannot divorce the personal from the political.

Nigel Potter

Nigel Potter was one of the founders of Proyecto Independiente de Salud Indígena Lenca (PISIL – Independent Lenca Indian Health Project) and worked for several years with the Central Nacional de los Trabajadores del Campo (CNTC – National Council for rural Workers), the largest campesino/peasant organization in Honduras.

We the Indians

The indigenous peoples of Peru and the struggle for land



HUGO BLANCO

foreword by
Eduardo Galeano