

# Reviews

## Interrogations

**John le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life*, Penguin Viking, 2016, 318 pages, hardback ISBN 9780241257555, £20**

‘Sakharov asks me whether I ever met Klaus Fuchs, the British atom scientist and Soviet spy, by then released from a British jail and living in East Germany. No, I never did.

Then do I happen to know by any chance how Fuchs was caught?

I know the man who interrogated him, I reply, but not how he was caught ...’

John le Carré, aka David Cornwell, has an abiding interest in interrogation:

‘All the best interrogators have a certain way with them, some personal characteristic they have learned to turn into a weapon of persuasion. Some present themselves as the soul of sweet reason, others strive to scare or unsettle; others to overwhelm you with their frankness or charm.’

Issa Kostoev is one of the best interrogators. In 1990, working for the Russian Police, he coaxed a confession from Andrei Chikatilo, a Ukrainian with bad breath who had serially murdered 53 people. Subsequently, as an Ingush elected to the Russian parliament, Kostoev campaigns for the rights of the peoples of the North Caucasus, including his fellow citizens of Ingushetia, whence in his words comes the Russian ‘*nigger*’.

John le Carré devotes six of the 38 ‘Stories from My Life’ (why upper case M?) to Russia. He visited twice, in the years before and after the fall of the Soviet Union. But he was formed as a writer and a person during the chilliest years of the Cold War, as a young spy in Germany in the early 1960s. So it was that he created George Smiley, the English spy immortalised by Alec Guinness, who was outplayed by Karla of Moscow Central.

‘These are true stories told from memory,’ le Carré tells us. ‘To the creative writer, fact is raw material, not his taskmaster but his instrument, and his job is to make it sing. Real truth lies, if anywhere, not in facts, but in nuance.’

*The Pigeon Tunnel* sings, notwithstanding its true stories. ‘His brother’s keeper’ is about the Soviet spy Kim Philby and his MI6 friend Nicholas Elliott. Elliott was a senior spy whom Cornwell came to admire, at least initially, when, in 1960, he transferred from MI5 to ‘those shits across the park’ in MI6. Decades later, in 1986, Elliott unburdened himself to the, by

now, celebrated author le Carré, or rather seemed to do so: ‘because what Elliott was telling me was not the story, but the cover story of his life’. There follows a series of quotations, introduced by le Carré as ‘Elliott on Philby’, so the ‘interrogator’ speaks for himself. Elliott had been dispatched to Beirut to confront Philby about spying for the Soviet Union. But Elliott fed le Carré a ‘sanitized’ version of his last encounter with Kim Philby.

‘Elliott had fought tooth and nail to protect his closest friend and colleague. Only when the case against Philby could no longer be denied did Elliott exert himself to obtain a confession – and a partial one at best – from his old pal. Whether by then he was under orders to give Philby the space to make good his escape to Moscow, we’ll probably never know for sure. Whether he was or not, he fooled me, just as he was fooling himself.’

This clangs rather than sings as a sharp assessment of one of many skeletons hanging in the Secret Intelligence Service’s cupboard. In Russia in 1990, Philby appeared in a series of five postage stamps honouring the most successful Soviet spies.

*Anthony Lane*

## **Hillary’s Descent**

**Diana Johnstone, *Queen of Chaos: The Misadventures of Hillary Clinton*, Counterpunch, 194 pages, ISBN 9780989763769, £13.85**

The opening two paragraphs of *Queen of Chaos* set the scene for the following 194 pages as Johnstone casts the main character, Hillary Clinton, as someone who perceives America as a rich and dominant country that must do all it can to maintain its position as top dog. This superiority complex, it is argued, has been preserved through multiple US military engagements that have been waged under the mantra of ‘defending human rights’ or ‘responsibility to protect’. Johnstone calls these ‘spoiler’ wars, which are started with no regard for the devastation wrought upon other countries by US ‘misadventures’. In fact, they are ‘intended to diminish potential rivals’ rather than aim for peace.

According to Johnstone in an interview with David Swanson, *Queen of Chaos* is not just about Hillary Clinton; is a critique of the chaos unleashed by the neoliberal governmentality (or model of governing) of the US establishment and its commitment to preserving the military-industrial

complex (MIC), of which Clinton is simply a personification<sup>1</sup>. *Queen of Chaos* evidences that policy, in general, is made with the interests of finance capital and billionaire elites in mind. Indeed, the economic elites have an active impact on US government policy in that the rich have the ‘advantage of personal contacts and influence over the politicians who make the laws and run the executive’ (pg. 1). Johnstone focuses on foreign policy, in particular that informed by the military-industrial complex via the National Security Council document 68 (NSC-68 of 1950 which ‘militarised the Cold War’) and various think tanks, as she sets out her case for the chaos that is rained down on the world stage by political actors such as Hillary Clinton.

As US Secretary of State, Mrs Clinton reflected the interests of this ‘war party’ (as Johnstone dubs the grouping of finance capital and the MIC) that has been influencing US foreign policy for decades. The author describes her as gung-ho, which is proven by an ‘intensification of US interference in the domestic affairs of fifty countries’ whilst in office. Alongside this are Clinton’s outspoken support for arming the Syrian rebels, her readiness to sell weapons to particularly brutal governments following contributions from them to her personal foundation, and her ‘bragging’ in *Hard Choices* (Simon and Schuster, 2014) about her role in the 2009 coup in Honduras and, later, in Libya.

The overthrow of President Zelaya in Honduras is the opening salvo in Johnstone’s critique of Hillary’s ‘misadventures’. Defending human rights was Clinton’s preferred pretext for renewed relations between the United States and various Latin American countries. However, argues Johnstone, regime change was the real purpose, and Clinton’s actions highlighted what and who she stands for, which is with the oligarchs who chose to decry Zelaya. Johnstone critiques Clinton’s use of the term ‘smart power’ by defining it as a way to linguistically repackage facilitating the military coup in Honduras (and beyond), which in effect plunged the country into a worse state than it was already. This model of intervention in the name of preventing human rights abuses and the promotion of democracy has been applied for many decades during the twentieth century, but it was during Bill Clinton’s Administration that ‘foreign policy focus shifted to human rights’ (pg. 57).

It was on this premise that, in the 1990s, demands were made for US and NATO involvement in the wars in Yugoslavia, in what the western media and governments designated primarily as a crisis of human rights. The bombing of Yugoslavia was described as a ‘humanitarian war’ to prevent the ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘threat of genocide’ of Albanians in Kosovo by the Serbs. This perspective of events is strongly criticised by the author, who describes how the anti-Serb propaganda escalated

dramatically during the course of the bombing, backed by false accusations of mass killings (pg. 63). Accusations of genocide by one side against the other were offered as justification of that war.

Preventing genocide alongside a critique of the ‘responsibility to protect’ are at the heart of *Queen of Chaos*.<sup>2</sup> Johnstone argues that US claims of genocide are, in the main, used to justify wars rather than prevent them. She argues that the pretext for some of the wars is to prevent genocide in a specific country. When that genocide doesn’t happen, this is attributed to the war that was waged, which is then perceived as justified.

For Johnstone, the core subject of *Queen of Chaos* is Mrs Clinton’s intellectual corruption, which allows Hillary to talk about human rights and LGBT campaigns, whilst simultaneously being very close to countries such as Saudi Arabia, where homosexuals are persecuted. It is almost as if she holds an ideology (‘smart power’) that enables this contradiction between what she says and who she interacts with. Fundamentally, for Johnstone, it is the ‘ideological fog’ of American Exceptionalism – that US ‘values and interests’ are overwhelmingly superior – coupled with the influence of the military-industrial complex, to which Hillary is wedded, that form the ‘basic problem’ fuelling US ‘preventive’ wars. As the US Presidential elections unfolded in 2016, the American public had a choice between the isolationism of Donald Trump or the interventionism of Hillary Clinton. Notwithstanding their choice, the belief in American Exceptionalism will continue.

*Abi Rhodes*

## Notes

1 <https://soundcloud.com/davidcswanson/talk-nation-radio-diana-johnstone-on-queen-of-chaos-the-misadventures-of-hillary-clinton>

2 Both of these issues have been examined in *The Spokesman* in issues 93 and 106 respectively.

## Global Trade Union Rights

**Daniel Blackburn and Ciaran Cross, editors, *Trade Unions of the World, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*, International Centre for Trade Union Rights, London, 2016, 678 pages, paperback ISBN 9780993355608, £140 from <http://www.ictur.org/TUW.htm>**

This is the most comprehensive directory of world trade unionism available, covering important organisations in the movement in almost 200

countries. The very weight of this volume really rests with the quality of the national entries. Each starts with a lengthy account of the political and economic history of the country, giving a broad sketch and pointing to interesting detail. There follows a section on the development of trade unions and human rights in the country, before the directory of its national federations and major unions. The directory includes – as a ‘rule of thumb’ – trade unions with membership of over 10,000, although this rule is clearly broken for smaller countries for which significant unions are listed. *Trade Unions of the World* is published by the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR), an international non-governmental organisation bringing together experts in law, human rights and industrial relations. In 1986, ICTUR was established by the World Federation of Trade Unions after complaints of an ‘unprecedented frontal attack’ on trade union rights. Certainly, from the vantage of the UK we can see this as a key period, immediately after the eighteen-month miners’ strike as well as a wave of trade union de-recognitions, instigated by a major assault of the Thatcher Government. Internationally, trade unions were under attack from the emergence of neoliberalism, with membership collapsing in advanced industrial countries, while in the newly industrial countries the movement was in the midst of often violent birth throws. The initial account of each country gives a clear and concise background to its politics and economy. In this 7<sup>th</sup> edition, the editor tells us:

‘This edition of *Trade Unions of the World* has moved the focus away from extensive examination of the industrial relations structures of the industrialised world towards a greater focus on trade union rights, and particularly on violations of those rights, and even more so on the most severe instances of such violations.’

ICTUR campaigns for the rights of trade unions and defends the rights of trade unionists against prosecution and persecution. Their quarterly journal, *International Union Rights*, is a key source for evidence of such persecution. In recent editions, for example, there are lengthy discussions of union rights in China, and on the massacre of around 200 strikers at the Marikana mines in South Africa.

You don’t have to delve far in *Trade Unions of the World* before finding evidence of attacks on unions and trade unionists. In Afghanistan, the National Union of Afghanistan Workers and Employees activist ‘Khudai Noor Khan ... brutally murdered and decapitated’. In Algeria ‘forty unionised contract teachers ... arrested during a sit-in protest’. In Andorra ‘private sector employees report fearing dismissal if they join a trade

union'. And that is just the first three of 198 entries. Some of the material makes sobering reading, certainly indicating the struggles that union activists face in many countries. However, there is far more contained in its 678 A4 pages. The directory is one reflection, though an important one, of ICTUR's work.

*Trade Unions of the World* is an invaluable reference guide to each and every one of the countries covered; when might you want a quick guide to the politics and economy of the Kyrgyz Republic – a page opened at random – or the email address of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress? It also proves a fascinating distraction with a wealth of interesting accounts of all the national and international entries. ICTUR deserves support.

*Alan Tuckman*

## **Down With Politics! Long Live Poems!**

**Karen Van Dyck (ed.), *Austerity Measures: The New Greek Poetry*, Penguin, 2016, 470 pages, paperback ISBN 9780241250624, £10.99**

**Theodoros Chiotis (ed.), *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis*, 2015, Penned in the Margins, 2015, 200 pages, paperback ISBN 9781908058249, £10.99**

To supplement this review, see also Noonie Minogue's, *TLS*, June 17, 2016, p. 10, plus *The Guardian*, May 11, 2016 (online) for interviews with Van Dyck and select contributors, plus this enthusiastic endorsement by Yanis Varoufakis:

'A silver lining...this volume is living proof that the Greek crisis is of global significance...it deserves an international readership – NOW!'

Both editors, along with readings of Greek poetry from Homer to present-day, may also be seen on YouTube.

'Anthologies are sickly things. Cut flowers have no vitality.' Thus, Francis Palgrave, on whose *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics* some older *Spokesman* readers, as myself, may have been nurtured. I used this as self-mocking epigraph for my own anthologies of Byzantine Poetry and Later Latin Literature, hoping these would refute old Palgrave.

The two complementary volumes here under review certainly do. Not that they are unprecedented. Van Dyck lists 13 print predecessors plus eight websites. Don't despise the latter. Some poets, e.g. Stithis Barotosos and Yannis Moundelos, have never published in print, preferring what they

call ‘digital samizdat’, adding ‘the place to be is not on paper’.

Many contributors evoke names and events from the classical past. This ancient-modern thread is indeed unbroken. Greek political poetry begins in Homer’s *Iliad* where Thersites speaks up for fellow-squaddies against their arrogant and greedy chieftains – he is knocked down by Odysseus, violence being their only response. Contrariwise, Theognis ranted his reactionary views in early lyric verse. All 11 surviving Aristophanes comedies are more or less political, especially *The Knights* where democracy and demagoguery (both Greek-derived words) are both crudely eviscerated and subtly investigated.

As classicist Simon Goldhill (*TLS*, September 2, 2016, p. 10) well observes: ‘In an age that has made Donald Trump a viable candidate for high office, Aristophanes may indeed be the best lens through which to look at society’ – read *The Knights* and you’ll agree ...

Van Dyck mentions the popularity with her poets of the 15-syllable ‘Political Verse’. She might have mentioned this was invented by the Byzantines, whose often politically-charged poetry was another staging-post.

Later come the Alexandrian maverick C. P. Cavafy, famous *inter alia* for his line ‘What’s going to happen to us without the barbarians? They were at least one kind of solution’. Afterwards, not forgetting Costa-Gavras’ film *Z*, Greece’s two Nobel Prize-winning poets, Elytis and Seferis, along with Ritsos and Theodorakis, bravely active during the Colonels’ regime – I recall an English protest march ditty – Pattakos, Pattakos, Baker’s Man/ Bake me a Fascist as fast as you can! During their rule, the Colonels banned 760 titles in all, notably ‘leftist’ editions of ancient Greek tragedies, plus the whole of Aristophanes.

Both anthologists have the right credentials. Van Dyck is Professor of Modern Greek at Columbia (NY). Theodoros Chiotis read Classics at London and Oxford. Should add that the publishers would only supply a pdf. of the latter’s volume. Why? Not the most helpful review format.

Both begin with the same poem, ‘Greece Downgraded Into Deeper Junk/ Every Politician is a Punk,’ juxtaposing classical references (Parthenon, Pericles, plus ‘We’ve lost our marbles, Elgin took a chunk’), by Athens-based American A. E. Stallings, who also contributes many translations, albeit oddly omitted from Van Dyck’s list of same, recently in the news for her (unsuccessful) nomination to the Oxford chair of poetry. In Chiotis, Stallings comes up with two of my favourite lines: ‘Nostalgia and tear-gas have the same acrid smells,’ and ‘Nothing is more permanent than the temporary’ – certainly true of many school and university buildings I’ve worked in.

As with their distinctively different titles, the two editorial prefaces differ markedly in attitude. Van Dyck, though kicking off with a litany of the foreign-imposed evils, adopts a somewhat resigned tone about ‘The dilemma of learning to live with less amid the expectation of more,’ quoting poet Katerina Anghelaki Rooke’s ‘Anorexia of Existence’.

Beginning with Cafavi’s 1918 letter to E. M. Forster – ‘We Greeks have lost our capital – and the result is what you see,’ blasting capitalism along with his ironic use of banking jargon for the various poetic rubrics: Assessment, Adjustment, Implementation, Singularity, Acceleration. Van Dyck, apart from Unjust Punishment, prefers more orthodox literary ones.

Dubbing his collection ‘An outlet for time of crisis,’ Chiotis begins with a generalizing ‘The poets who make up the anthology map out the border where the personal dissolves into the political,’ ending similarly with ‘These are poems that communicate the ever-proliferating emergencies and attempt to conceive of new strategies to connect, speak, assemble, love, and survive’.

‘Crisis’ is also a Greek word. Chiotis underlines his aphorisms by spotlighting select poems, e.g. Emily Critchley’s ‘But value must be changed, change valued/Why, there’s enough, let alone blame, to go around,’ and Yannis Stigas’ invocation, ‘My good Lord Byron,/ You suffered the exit for nothing/ You led the way to the exit for nothing...’

Chiotis illustrates his volume with Athenian street graffiti; cf. [appetiteofwalls.tumblr.com](http://appetiteofwalls.tumblr.com) for more. Back in 1983, classicist Peter Green spotted on Lesbos, where he was living, a wall-slogan proclaiming ‘Down With Politics! Long Live Poems!’

Chiotis has around 50 poets, including 14 women – oddly, no biographical notes are supplied, though there are for the translators. Van Dyck has similar proportions, noting ‘There are more women writing at any time since the Dictatorship’ – her selections embrace many levels and shades of feminism. Also, a noticeable (very Greek) gay presence – I can hear Orwell muttering his ‘fashionable pansies’ gibe.

Other choice verses in Chiotis include: ‘Your sorrow is a poem of the street’ (George Prevedourakis); ‘Fear seals and sews shut the eyes of History’ (Eftychia Panegiotou); ‘The tainted words, Drachma and Dollaria’ (Eleni Philippou).

Van Dyck weighs in at twice the size. Her anthology is a model of professionalism. Greek texts (in a clear, readable font, accurately produced) face English versions. Endnotes explain necessary background information and trace historical-literary sources when required. Each poet gets a full-page bio-bibliography, each translator the same in smaller

compass. Indexes of poems in both languages facilitate cross-referencing for readers and reviewers.

Some of the poets are non-Greek. Many can write in an enviable number of languages, operating in different countries and districts – the section on provincial Greek poets is especially welcome: on television news we tend to see only Athenian rioters. There is rare emphasis on (e.g.) Bulgarian and Serbian literature and political activity. Albanians recur (e.g. Gazmend Kapllani), fittingly since Albania has a substantial Greek minority and several thousand years of more than geographical ties; cf. one of Enver Hoxha's best books, *Two Friendly Peoples*.

Apart from those who slide off into what Orwell, writing of Henry Miller whose *Colossus of Maroussi* remains one of the best books about Greece ever written, dubbed 'the squashy universe of the surrealists,' I enjoyed all Van Dyck's selections. Baldwin Prize for best line goes to Chloe Haralambous: 'Juntas accessorize their wanks with national emblems'. As does Chiotis in his preface, I play a few favourites, notably the incendiary tirades of Jazra Khaleed ('I'm waiting for a revolution to invent me/ Hungering for the language of class war'), plus Paulina Marvin and Z. D. Ainalis with their palpable echoes of The Clash, the Sex Pistols, and Alan Ginsberg's 'Howl', and Christos Angelakos who writes to the accompaniment of his favourite music, not bouzouki but Amy Winehouse.

All very different from the sentimentalities of *Never on Sunday*, *Zorba the Greek*, and *Shirley Valentine*.

Barry Baldwin

OUTSIDE ATHENS

Από σήμερα

Από σήμερα  
 Ζεις μια υποβρύχια ζωή  
 Μέσα στο σκοτάδι της αβύσσου  
 Πασχίζεις να παράγεις  
 Το δικό σου φως  
 Κολυμπώντας  
 Κάπως σαν εκείνα τα φρικαλέα ψάρια της αβύσσου  
 Με το φωτάκι που κρέμεται σαν έντερο  
 Εμπρός τους  
 Κινδυνεύοντας να προσβληθείς  
 Από τη νόσο του δύτη  
 Να γεμίσει το αίμα σου νερό  
 Να γίνεις  
 Μια φυσαλίδα  
 Να γκρεμιστείς στο άπειρο  
 Κυλώντας μέσα σ' ένα  
 Πελώριο  
 Συμπαντικό  
 Δάκρυ

ELSA KORNETI

As of Today

As of today  
 You live your life underwater  
 In the darkness of the deep  
 Struggling to emit  
 Your own light  
 Swimming  
 Like those freakish deep-sea fish  
 With that little lantern dangling gutlike  
 In front of them  
 Always in danger of falling prey  
 To divers' disease  
 Of having your blood fill with water  
 Of becoming  
 An air bubble  
 Of being extinguished in that immensity  
 Rolling around in a  
 Colossal  
 Cosmic  
 Tear

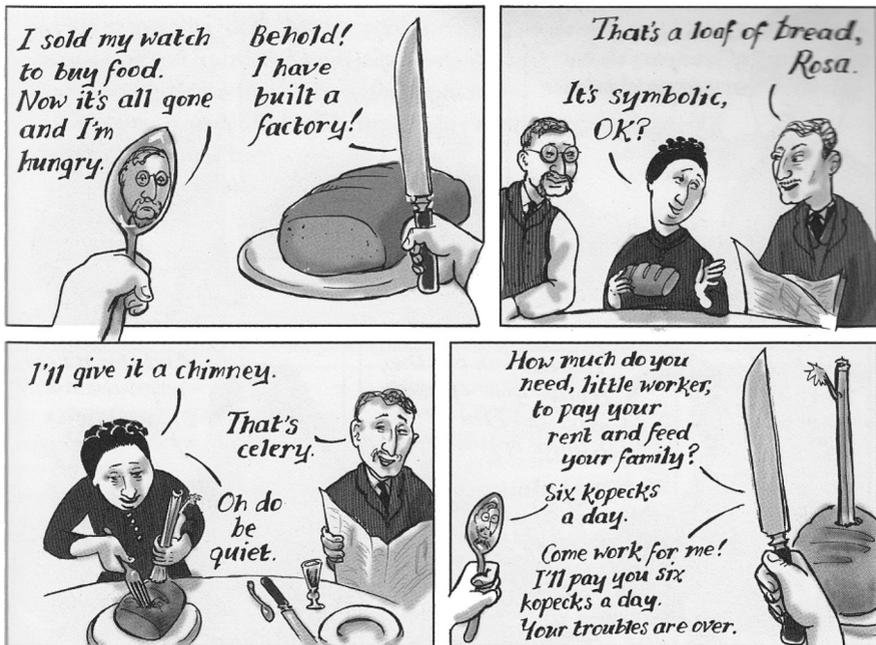
## Spice

**Kate Evans, edited by Paul Buhle, *Red Rosa: A graphic biography of Rosa Luxemburg*, Verso, 220 pages, paperback ISBN 9781784780999, £9.99**

Usually I find that graphic novels about historical figures tend to humanise their subject, and help them a few steps down off their pedestals. This interpretation of the life of Rosa Luxemburg certainly does the former, but perhaps not so much the latter – you feel she'd clamber back up to orate!

I'm not quite sure whether I should refer to Kate Evans as 'the author' or 'the artist' of the book; both aspects are excellent in their own right, but all the better for their coherent union. Editor Paul Buhle's name is modestly absent from the cover. How exactly he edited the work is not explained, but his afterword outlines Rosa's posthumous legacy, including the shadow she cast over social movements that came after, reprints of her works, and the formation of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Foundation) in 1990, which endures to this day.

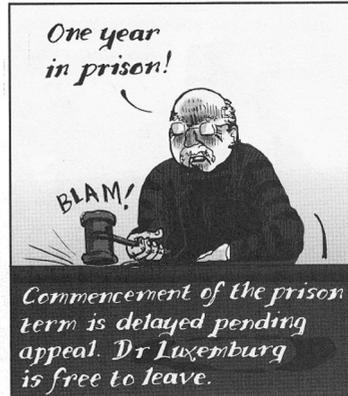
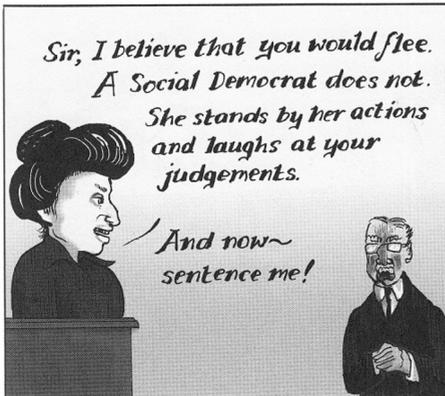
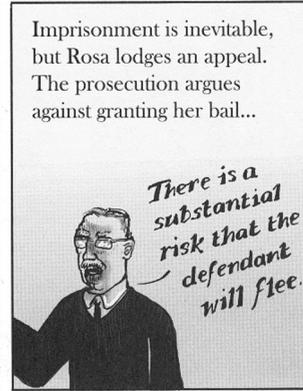
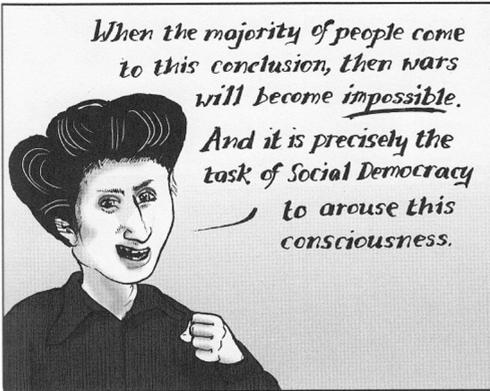
As the book opens we are bystanders to Rosa's early Jewish family life. In spite of the discrimination Jews face in her native Poland, she enjoys a lively upbringing, debating with her elder brothers, who indulge her developing interest in leftist theory. To an extent this leaves her loving but traditional



mother bemused – she is more concerned with the development of Rosa’s sense of propriety, anxious to instil in her the mores befitting a young Jewish woman. Rosa has to submit to a degree, but her political engagement begins.

By the age of seventeen, she is deemed too ‘obvious’ (young, female, Jewish, with a congenital limp), a liability to her local socialist movement. Kicked out of the club, this stumbling block seems to pave the way for the course of her activist life. She begs her parents to send her to Switzerland to study at the University of Zurich, the only one which will admit women students. There she studies and networks, carefully coding her correspondence to avoid detection by the police. To cut a long story exceedingly short, there follows a life of theorising, spirited addresses, illegal newspaper publications and prison sentences, before her murder at the hands of the government-sponsored Freikorps.

On reading, you could easily assume Comic-Rosa’s turn of phrase to be dramatisation, but for all its outrageousness a lot of her character’s script comes from her own mouth (and pen). The solid section of endnotes, citing



extracts from Rosa's letters and works, attests to this. Admittedly, the author explains moments where her 'co-stars' had to be conflated, or events tweaked in the telling, but this is inevitable. It's a delight to sense the historical accuracy as Rosa lays waste to her opponents with her words; yet it would be wrong to laud the dialogue and neglect to mention her character design. Evans' cheekily-smiling Rosa is indomitable and irresistible.

Midway through the book comes the privilege of being challenged directly by Rosa herself, in a little overstep of the fourth wall. The reader assumes the role of student as Frau Dr. Luxemburg demands our attention return to matters of capitalism, communism and historical materialism, not, as it is implied, her personal life. Once class is dismissed, the regular narrative resumes. It's a nice segue in order to introduce her tenure as lecturer of political economy at the SPD Party School.

Many of her eminent comrades are brought to life on the page, amongst them Marxist theorist Clara Zetkin, philosopher Karl Kautsky, and Karl Liebknecht. Her love interests are recreated as pleasant enough characters, albeit vapid in comparison to her, with one notable exception: the enigmatic Leo Jogiches, whose possessive side is brought to the fore as the joy of youth fades from their relationship. Returning – escaping – from a prison sentence in Siberia only to discover her attached to Kostya Zetkin (son of Clara), Rosa and the reader alike are left afraid of what he might do, threatened now by other lovers as well as her spirit and intellect. Given that Leo is a wanted man, Kostya suggests alerting the authorities. For Rosa, this is out of the question: 'I can't believe you would suggest such a thing. With everything he does for socialism?'

Evans' character artwork deliberately highlights the contrast between the two. Whereas we watch Leo becoming increasingly careworn throughout the book, battered by the trials of their work, Rosa's constitution renews itself with each challenge, never losing her vim even as she ages. Indeed, Leo's portrayal is a bit leering by the end – he obviously never redeems himself to the artist after she draws him hissing death threats to Rosa. However, some time after this conflict, and without an explanation as to what has since passed between them, she shows them working together again rather agreeably.

To say just a little more on the art in general, it doesn't gloss over the honesty of emotions. Various panels of crying faces reflect Picasso's *Weeping Woman* in their rawness. The changing expressions of a surly-turned-supportive crowd of miners bring an understated humour.

The historical period covered by this biography is quite complex, with a plethora of social movements rising and operating throughout Europe.

The creators of the book rose to the challenge of summarising things quite deftly. Wider developments in which Rosa plays less of a role are given their fair share of pages, helping to contextualise her work, and her stance and behaviour as conveyed here.

In a semi-comical scene depicting the nuts and bolts of getting a revolution off the ground, a protestor seeks out Liebknecht for a signature on a declaration, an afterthought to make their demands more credible to guards at the Ministry of War. A bemused Liebknecht complies. Astonishingly, this sequence of events really did take place! The document proposed a *putsch* targeting Friedrich Ebert, the first president of Germany, with whom many revolutionaries had become disillusioned. According to the book's notes, it seemed to be Liebknecht's first time reading it. The air of farce reminds one of *Blackadder* getting Lord Melchett to inadvertently sign his own death warrant.

Did Karl effectively sign his own? Shortly after this a bounty is set upon



both his head and Rosa's – and redeemed.

Serious Luxemburg scholars might possibly prefer a more rigid adherence to the history, and less spice, but for the casual reader this is a very enjoyable experience, convincingly researched.

*Nicole Morris*

## Vanguard

**Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso, 272 pages, Paperback ISBN 9781784780968, £12.99**

*Inventing the Future* aspires to move the Left in a new direction, which the authors hope will put socialism back on the political agenda as a real

possibility in an advanced industrial economy. It is written by two young academics who are in a hurry, and whose brash criticism of much of the activity of the radical Left must grate on many activists' ears. But no matter – praise for the book has been extensive, from the likes of Owen Jones, Paul Mason, Mike Davis and many other luminaries of the Left. The book has earned such accolades as 'fascinating', 'powerful', 'compelling', 'important' and many others, so presumably it must have something to say that is of relevance to our present situation.

The writers affirm they are writing in the context of the abject surrender to market economics of many social democratic parties, the throttling of trade unionism, and the collapse of Soviet style 'socialism' in the Eastern Bloc. Given all this, for the authors, the Left's response has been to indulge in what they disdainfully refer to as 'folk politics', which may have certainly stirred things up from time to time but has not provided an ongoing movement with the necessary *élan* to seriously threaten capitalism and its neoliberal defenders. They remark,

'This is politics transmuted into pastime – politics-as-drug-experience, perhaps – rather than anything capable of transforming society.'(page 7)

The example used repeatedly in the text is Occupy, which the authors claim provides the most graphic illustration of a movement which had nowhere to go. In chapter two this argument is fleshed out with more examples demonstrating the 'incapacity of contemporary leftist movements' (page 25). Other leftist maladies which have been discovered by our authors include 'horizontalism', typified by direct action, a rejection of domination in any form, direct democracy aiming at consensus, and 'a commitment to prefigurative politics' (page 27). There is insufficient space to provide the detail of this overly confrontational argument, but it must be said that they do make clear, both in the text and in the 'Afterword' to the revised edition, that thankfully some 'folk politics' does contribute to the Left's pressure for change and is not a total waste of energy. Rather than dwelling any further on this aspect of *Inventing the Future*, we should perhaps turn to what their suggested solutions are to this malaise.

Srnicek and Williams' critique espouses four specific demands in the light of what they consider is going to be qualitative advancement in new automated technology. The consequence, if not ameliorated, will be a dramatic increase in unemployment. The Left is sometimes accused of looking backwards to past struggles, and being strangely conservative when it comes to new technologies. This is hardly surprising, given that,

often, the downside costs of industrial change are mostly shouldered by the working class, and this so-called '4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution' of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) could so easily follow the same pattern. With dire warnings from the likes of a research team at Oxford University and another report from the Bank of America and Merrill Lynch, we are to expect in the next 20 years some 35 per cent of jobs in Britain and 47 per cent of US jobs to disappear.

The first demand by Srnicek and Williams is that the Left steal a march on the owners of industrial capital by demanding that companies should seek to maximise the level of automation. This would put a positive direction, rather than the usual negative, on the Left's campaign. This embracing of a futuristic glimpse of a utopian world where the drudgery and boredom of the present working day is drastically minimised is an important part of their optimistic appeal. This may all seem a little idealistic but the authors wish to make the movement have more of a confident impetus, a positive future, an alternative dream to capitalism's essentially Hobbesian 'war of all against all'. There are, however, a number of problems with all this. Firstly, is there sufficient *renewable* energy to cope with this leap into automating operations previously not requiring much electricity? This transformation is going to happen in the context of climate change and the exhaustion of fossil fuels, not to mention that this new harmonious society will have to contend with a world scarred by the legacy of environmental pollution. Brian Davey, a respected ecologist, has written a long and trenchant article criticising *Inventing the Future*, in particular for its assumption that localised sustainable energy sources can provide the required power to fire up the '4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution'. Davey also takes a swipe at much of the rest of the book, asserting that, far from helping a red/green alliance, it rubbishes much of green ideology: localism, small scale initiatives, appropriate technology, and 'a politics that rejects all hierarchy' (see [www.feasta.org](http://www.feasta.org)).

If the advances in robotics and Artificial Intelligence are anything approaching the levels prophesied, then unemployment will rise dramatically, and it is here that the second of the authors' demands comes into play – Universal Basic Income (UBI). The UBI proposal has been debated in the context of welfare for some time but, as *Inventing the Future* points out, the changes on the way add a new urgency. We already have the self-evident problem of the 'reserve army of labour' and the draconian labour regimes inflicted on the 'precarariat' in many parts of the economy. The book contains a long discussion about the idea of 'surplus labour' and UBI globally.

It should be made clear that considerable advances in robotics have

already been made in repetitive machine operation and are now in progress in warehousing and logistics. For Alan Whitfield (Professor at the Bristol Robotics Laboratory) it is 'knowledge workers (lawyers, call centre workers, translators, data analysts, etc.)' who are going to be hit hardest by the second robotics wave. Therefore, the idea of a payment for not working is being discussed even by several rightist think-tanks and the more aware of the political/business elite, who worry that the present bread and circuses may be insufficient to appease the unemployed citizens.

At this point the authors enlist their third demand, that of a drastic reduction in working hours and, flowing from that, the last major demand, namely an attack on the work ethic itself. There are dangers in all this: Universal Basic Income must not be pitched so low that only the most Spartan workless could survive on such a regime. Nor should it be used as a method of reducing welfare payments, which will be a temptation for government. Knowing how the Welfare State has been pilloried by the media and chiselled away at by government, a large section of the population, certainly of the UK, would see Universal Basic Income as a licence for 'scroungers'.

The authors, in this context, want to develop a different attitude to work from that implicit in much present day thinking. Increasingly, British industry's workforce is becoming the target of some form of electronic surveillance, checking quality, monitoring discipline and production speeds and, when coupled with long hours, anti-social working times, zero hours contracts, and overtime to obtain a decent wage, is surely enough to cope with. If the authors are correct, this further threat of a new leap in automation all points to a highly disenchanting workforce, ready to listen to radical proposals. Reduced working hours without loss of pay makes so much more sense in this context. Certainly initially, therefore, the traditional labour movement's demand for a shorter working week and reduced hours, without loss of pay, may have more traction than Universal Basic Income.

Of much relevance to the above are the ideas of the Institute for Workers' Control in the 1970s, '80s and '90s that working hours needed reducing. This campaigning organisation raised the demand for reduced working hours at the height of the attack on the unions, with its appeal for a 1,000-working-hour year by the year 2000! One slogan emblazoned on the cover of *European Labour Forum* magazine still resonates down the years – 'Working Time – Work Less – Work Better'. Doesn't this apply to all those junior doctors forced to risk patient health by long hours, to the tired airline pilots forced to work to the point where mistakes become a distinct possibility, and to those members of the 'precarariat' slaving away at Sports Direct?

There has to be an incentive for the capitalist to employ robotics and Artificial Intelligence, which may not be present where the twin evils of low pay and the ‘reserve army of labour’ are dominant. If enhanced automation was utilised, and workers gained leisure time, not only for democratic control of the enterprise, but to have a key influence over the products produced, then the ideas associated with a lost technical and social craftsmanship could be revitalised. *Inventing the Future* raises the experience of workers at the Lucas Aerospace plants in the 1970s and the work of the trade union shop-stewards. Threatened by redundancies because of cuts in the defence budget and the collapse of Rolls-Royce, they researched alternative products intended to benefit the human race, not annihilate it. (Their story is told in a book written by Mike Cooley, recently re-published by Spokesman, *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*.)

Srnicek and Williams delve into the history and methods by which neoliberal eminences such as Hayek formed the Mont Pelerin Society, a ‘closed intellectual network’, which was to become highly influential in building alliances amongst the anti-Keynesians. Their book notes the development of Hayek and his disciples, and how over a relatively long period of time they gained ideological hegemony. We know only too well the destruction and mayhem this ideology has caused, in the hands of the conservative elite, for the international working class and its political organisations. However, the authors think we can, in some way, learn from the progression of neoliberalism and adapt the technique to gain ascendancy. Certainly, patience and determination are something to which we should pay heed, and as they remark:

‘The call for a Mont Pelerin of the Left should therefore not be taken as an argument to simply copy its mode of operation. The argument is that the Left can learn from the long-term vision, the methods of global expansion, the pragmatic flexibility ...’ (page 67)

Neoliberalism, having found a nest in academia, was able to persuade the elite in business, the media and, finally, politicians in power that it was an ideology that could contain the more truculent members of society.

The authors’ fourth demand is for a wholesale alteration in our attitude to work, a change in its ‘common sense’ meaning. Reinvigorated by neoliberalism, business ideology has penetrated the minds of millions, which is explained in the chapter ‘A New Common Sense’. The counter argument is introduced with the entertaining sub-heading, ‘The Right to be Lazy’. It is a heart-warming scenario where the hidden talents of the ‘idlers’ enhance their technical, social and cultural knowledge. But, as the text makes clear, we

have a long way to go to reach such rarefied heights, and the struggle will require organisational forms that cannot be met by ‘folk politics’.

There are a number of themes in *Inventing the Future* that have not been touched on by this review and perhaps some of the content requires explanatory detail that is missing. But, in spite of all the issues it raises, perhaps the weakest element is the lack of content regarding the renewable energy required to drive this automated society. Furthermore, in this inventive future where is the caveat that the future is likely to be more dystopian than utopian, given what informed experts keep on telling us about climate change? As to the criticism of the folk politics of the Left, the authors need to temper their rejection of single issue campaigns. It is probably true that some are a distraction from the main event but, for example, is it therefore the case that because the abolition of nuclear weapons may not bring about socialism we should no longer demand their abolition?

If the overall thrust of the book’s argument is to be fulfilled, what kind of movement is required? This is probably the most dense and difficult part of the book. Although we know what underpins such a movement ideologically, it is difficult to delineate the form the movement should take. The authors, for their part, describe a movement that has vision – that knows what its ultimate goal is, with the four dictums outlined in the book presumably being their transitional programme of structural reforms. It would be a movement that brings together those involved in ‘folk politics’, (those worthy to be included, I should add) and generally those who are ‘attempting to overcome large-scale issues’. They would combine their perspectives in a collectivism provided by what can only be described as a *vanguard* movement, a phrase that has a history! The authors have been accused of aspiring to be ‘technocratic Leninists’, which, of course, they vehemently deny.

For all its iconoclastic remarks, or perhaps because of them, this is a stimulating book, one might say provocative, which deserves to be read and argued about by all those who call themselves socialists – a fate that would not disappoint the authors.

*John Daniels*

### **The poetry is in the poetry**

**Geert Buelens, *Everything to Nothing: The Poetry of the Great War, Revolution and the Transformation of Europe*, Verso, 392 pages, hardback, ISBN 9781784781491, £20**

School teachers in Britain find the poets of the Great War teachable, it

seems, because they combine ‘masculine’ action with ‘feminine’ sentiment. This was the only poetry I found undergraduates of either sex ever responded to with uncomplaining familiarity, even affection. It had no clever-clever subtext. War sucks.

Living here, you might easily imagine that, despite its reputation for having been ‘a poets’ war’, the First World War really only generated work of any interest by three men, Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. A little more digging and you might come up with Robert Graves, David Jones and Ivor Gurney. Even as we commemorate the centenaries, very little is being said or done to complicate the picture. What do we ever ask about the British and Irish political context when reading the likes of Owen and Sassoon? Other than in the most general anti-war sensibility, where do we see their politics? The simple, resonant phrases are allowed to cover it all. ‘Lest we forget’ (even while we do forget); ‘At the going down of the sun and in the morning / We will remember them’ (even while we don’t).

In his remarkable survey of European poets’ involvement in debates about the War, Geert Buelens adjusts the record. For a start, he covers the whole of Europe and poetry in most of its languages. He also acknowledges fully the extent to which poetry actually celebrated the outbreak of war, and was used as an instrument to propagandise nationalist interests, both political and cultural. In Hungary, the poet Árpád Tóth welcomed the war as a means to revolutionise Hungarian literature, which he regarded as resembling ‘a fat, sick, tuberculotic blob trampled by a military boot’. Gabriele D’Annunzio said of himself: ‘I am a poet of slaughter’. (Buelens adds, ‘no one meant it as literally as he did’.)

The other factor in the stagnation of the British approach is best represented by that resonant utterance of Owen’s, ‘The poetry is in the pity’. I have seen it quoted in virtually every A-level or undergraduate essay I ever graded on the topic, and all relevant exhibitions I ever went to. Hardly anyone pauses to ask what it means, still less whether its claim is true. For my money, the poetry is not in the pity at all, even if pity is aroused by many of the poems. The poetry is in the poetry. British students who are taught only about Brooke, Sassoon and Owen will know nothing of the interface between the Great War and the development of Modernism. In the work of that trio, only the timid innovation of Owen’s ‘pararhyme’ gestures in the direction of any newness of form since Keats. Not a whiff of Futurism, for instance. Here is the Futurist supremo Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, getting into his stride:

800 metres snip snip snap fire crackling  
 BOOM BOOM get down it's the Brion firing  
 sssshhhrrrrrrapnels ... PIIING ... sssrr zit zit zit POW  
 = gasometer exploding on the right  
 Austrian candidate down blaze subdued  
 the firemen return[.]

For many continental writers, the unprecedented horrors of the war demanded a literature unprecedented in its rejection of conventional order and beauty. We see this dilemma formalised after the war, of course, in Eliot's 'The Waste Land'.

Buelens argues that, 'From the start of the conflict, poets played a central role in mobilizing large groups of people. The war culture ... was, to a large extent, a literary culture, and more specifically a poetic one'. He rightly adds that, until now, most literary critics have restricted their analyses of this culture to 'a national paradigm', even though 'the intensely studied [international] avant-garde of the period was profoundly influenced by the war'. Not that he is particularly interested in experimentation for its own sake, since 'poetry is not an ornament fabricated for and by aesthetes, but a source of knowledge about the past and a demonstration of how that past was shaped by words'. Some of us already knew this, and it is not really the point of Buelens' book. Coming on his last page, it sounds like a belated excuse for literary history itself, superfluous to the main task.

In fact, the overall picture his excellent book conveys is of a strong mutuality between culture and warfare. We are subjected to a babbling Babel of poets from all the different ethnicities and language minorities, often in the midst of independence struggles – but sometimes, like the Latvians siding with the Russians, or like those of the Irish who fought with Britain, as the lesser evil than the Germans. Judicious attention is also paid, of course, to such sideshows as the Easter Rising and the Russian Revolution. One abiding image we are left with, repeated in various locations across Europe, is of mutually incompatible nationalist interests demanding the same stretch of land for different historical reasons going back centuries.

Buelens is not interested in performing close readings of the poetry. He generally allows the quotations, which are many and well chosen, to speak for themselves. Indeed, one feels grateful that he does not comment on poems, when the alternative might be glibly inept. For instance, after quoting Yeats' 'changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born' (from 'Easter, 1916'), he writes: 'Despite its cruelty and horror, violence could

give birth to beauty'. This is not even correct as a vague paraphrase and would have been better left unsaid. The same must be said of a cringe-worthy moment when Buelens crassly concludes a passage about Albert-Paul Granier, 'Verdun put the "mud" into "muddling through".'

*Everything to Nothing* is not just about the broad sweep of political history, of course. It contains many heart-wrenching stories of individual lives and deaths, which themselves cast light on the general picture. As in Owen and Sassoon, the personal low-point is often resonant with broader significance. But try to imagine a British poet saying anything like these fragrant lines from Carl Zuckmayer's poem '1917', following on from a pithy account of the horrors of life as a soldier in the war:

And so I take my seed in my hand –  
 Europe's future, black-specked spawn;  
 A god drowns in a sludge-filled pond! –  
 And shit my legacy on the wall.

*Gregory Woods*

## GRODEK

*Georg Trakl*

At nightfall the autumn woods cry out  
 With deadly weapons and the golden plains  
 The deep blue lakes above which more darkly  
 Rolls the sun; the night embraces  
 Dying warriors, the wild lament  
 Of their broken mouths.  
 But quietly there in the willow dell  
 Red clouds in which an angry god resides,  
 The shed blood gathers, lunar coolness.  
 All the roads lead to blackest carrion.  
 Under golden twigs of the night and stars  
 The sister's shade now sways through the silent copse  
 To greet the ghosts of the heroes, the bleeding heads;  
     And softly the dark flutes of autumn sound in the reeds.  
 Oh prouder grief! You brazen altars,  
 Today a great pain feeds the hot flame of the spirit,  
 The grandsons yet unborn.

*(trans. David McKay)*

**DANCE OF DEATH, 1916***Hugo Ball*

And so we die, and so we die,  
 we're dying every day now,  
 for it's such a comfort to welcome death.  
 In the morning still asleep,  
 by afternoon we're down.  
 In the evening well and truly underground.

Battle is our bawdy house,  
 our sun is dark and bloody,  
 death our only watchword, our only sign.  
 Wife and child we leave behind –  
 still, what do we care?  
 No one minds as long as we are there.

*(trans. David McKay)***Nuclear security project?**

**William J Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, Stanford University Press, 2015, 276 pages, hardback ISBN 9780804797122, £70**

This is an important book by William J. Perry, a former Cold Warrior and highly respected US Secretary of Defense in the Clinton Administration (1993 to 1997). Over the last decade he has become more widely known for his warnings, in concert with three other prominent former Cold Warrior colleagues (Nunn, Kissinger and Shultz),<sup>1</sup> of the growing global nuclear peril and the urgency for progress towards a nuclear-free world. Beginning in 2007, these 'reformed' Cold Warriors have voiced their concerns and guidance in a series of internationally noted editorials in the *Wall Street Journal*.

After decades of personal and professional involvement in a dangerous Cold War, often at the brink of nuclear annihilation, Perry (and colleagues) has come to see the existential necessity of nuclear disarmament. As he puts it in his preface:

'A lifetime immersed in special access to and top-secret assessment of strategic nuclear options has given me a unique, and chilling, vantage point from which to conclude that nuclear weapons no longer provide for our security, they endanger it '(p. xiv).

The ending of the Cold War was, of course, a remarkable achievement, but it was not a 'problem solved': there are new dangers arising from post-Cold War nuclear proliferation (India, Pakistan and North Korea), worsening US-Russian relations, and the unfolding of a new nuclear arms race. Perry tells us that the chances of nuclear catastrophe are today greater than at the height of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

### **Some Cold Warrior background**

Perry truly was a Cold Warrior in the sense that he played an active part as a long-time denizen of the 'military industrial complex' (yes, the one that Eisenhower warned us about), although he acknowledges his own doubtful participation in a nuclear arms race replete with its 'unthinkable surreal overkill' that both sides foolishly pursued to the brink of Armageddon (pp. 35, 55).

He gives us an interesting look back at his long career in the defence establishment. He joined the Army (Air Cadet Program) in the last months of World War Two while taking courses at Carnegie Tech. When the Program was discontinued he enlisted in the Army Engineers, which took him to Japan (as part of the Army of Occupation) where, in the early post-war months, he saw and was deeply moved by the devastation of modern war, including Hiroshima. He transferred to Stanford in 1947 where he earned his B.S. and M.S. in mathematics, and went on to Penn State (1950-3) for his Ph. D. The Korean War and the rise of the Cold War regenerated his national defence concerns, and he put teaching aspirations aside to apply his maths skills to defence matters at Sylvania's Electronic Defense Laboratories (a main defence contractor) for the next ten years.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), Perry was called to Washington by CIA analysts to help evaluate reconnaissance images of Soviet missiles in Cuba. He was profoundly affected by the Crisis and recounts that catastrophe was even closer than we thought:

'I believed then, and still believe, that the world avoided a nuclear holocaust as much by good luck as by good management' (p. 3).<sup>3</sup>

When new electronic technologies came on the scene, he left Sylvania to start his own company. ESL, Inc. (1963), developing digital electronic systems in spy technologies for the Department of Defense in keeping ahead of Soviet weapons development and ballistic missile defences. At ESL he was chief executive officer and president for nearly fifteen years, until it was sold to TRW, Inc. (an American corporation largely concerned with aerospace and systems engineering) about the time he was called to serve as

an under secretary of defense in the Carter Administration (1977) overseeing production and testing of weapons, including communications and intelligence systems. With Carter's defeat (1980), Perry returned to civilian life: some investment banking, some teaching, and security-related Track 2 diplomacy – i.e. unofficial contacts with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – involving yearly trips with a Stanford group to the USSR and China meeting with academics and scholars. Back into government in 1993, he served as Secretary of Defense under Clinton until 1997.

### **Early post-Cold War years**

Perry's service as Secretary of Defense was a mixed bag. He made considerable efforts to discourage N. Korea's quest for nuclear weapons – a bumpy (and ultimately a failed) diplomacy, but one sporadically yielding progress. As late as 2000, when G. W. Bush became president, Perry believed there was a fair chance of normalizing relations with N. Korea and getting them to give up nuclear aspirations in exchange for economic revival. He recommended to Bush that talks continue, but they were abruptly cut off. N. Korea tested its first nuclear weapon in 2006. He calls the long effort 'the most unsuccessful diplomacy in US history' (p. 171).

He worked effectively during the Bosnia crisis (mid 1990s), especially in securing a surprising degree of co-operation with NATO from Russia and the former Warsaw Pact countries, many of which hoped to join NATO in the near future. Perry himself was amenable to their eventually becoming part of NATO, but unlike under secretary of state Holbrooke and others who proposed immediate membership in 1996, he wanted to delay any NATO expansion until Russia was ready, as he told Clinton, lest US-Russian relations be seriously damaged. But Vice President Gore favoured expansion without delay and convinced Clinton who then approved membership for Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (and the Baltic states in 1999). Perry regrets not making a stronger case for delay, and even considered resigning (pp. 128-29). When the Bush Administration came on a few years later and promptly renounced the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty (in order to put US ballistic missile defences in eastern Europe, purportedly directed at Iran), relations with Russia deteriorated and, since 2014, have become dangerously hostile.

### **Recent diplomacy and disarmament work**

Perry's intense Track 2 talks over the last decade include meetings with non-governmental organizations in nuclear-armed states which are not signatories of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (N. Korea, Pakistan

and India) and have, by his own account, been both encouraging and disappointing. So, too, with US-Russia relations (p. 187), which he separates into ‘heady progress’ (2007-10) and ‘a long backward slide’ (2011-14).

Perry’s informal NGO talks in Iran eventually led to government-to-government talks between Iran and the P5 + 1 (the five permanent members of the Security Council – all nuclear weapon states) plus Germany (2008), and finally yielded a remarkable and tightly verifiable non-proliferation agreement in 2015 (several months *after* Perry’s book went to press).<sup>4</sup> Another positive bit of progress, of course, was the 2010 signing of the US-Russia New START treaty (reducing deployed warheads to 1550 each by 2018).<sup>5</sup> But the ‘backward slide’ with Russia, he believes, arose about the time of the ratification process of New START (2011); it was unexpectedly contentious and nearly defeated (on both sides). And Russia, disturbed by the US continued installation of missile defences in Eastern Europe, ominously showed no interest in a follow-on treaty to New START. By 2014, tensions between Ukraine and Russia had become heated: Russian troops entered Ukraine, annexed Crimea, supported eastern Ukraine separatists and soon the region was immersed in civil war. In response, the US has organized international sanctions against Russia which, in turn, has made threats against Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> This has not only halted US-Russia disarmament progress, it has led to their (and China’s) re-building of nuclear weapons systems. Perry notes that Russia has renounced its ‘no first use’ policy, and expects it will soon withdraw from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to begin new weapons testing.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* Perry puts great importance on keeping a ‘vision’ of a nuclear-free world but insists that the goal can only be achieved in steps, not with a single agreement. The goal, if achievable, will take time. Meanwhile, current dangers must be mitigated if we are to avoid what Einstein called an ‘unparalleled catastrophe.’<sup>8</sup> In the NSP’s fifth *Wall Street Journal* op-ed (2013) Perry and colleagues sketch the most important of these steps (pp. 188-9):

\*Remove all ICBMs from prompt-launch status to increase decision time to avoid precipitous response to a false alarm.<sup>9</sup>

\*Accelerate nuclear reductions (under New START) and announce willingness to go below those levels; and declare support for reductions of US and Russian tactical nukes in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

\*Enhance verification and transparency so necessary for trust in reaching disarmament agreements.

\*Secure nuclear materials to prevent nuclear terrorism – materials now stored

at hundreds of sites around the world in 25 countries. There are still sites not adequately secured, and there is still no global system in place to track, manage and secure all weapons-usable materials.’

### **Some critical reflections**

**1 Israel.** Surprisingly, Perry barely mentions Israel’s nuclear weapons, and he says nothing of its undermining the cause of non-proliferation in the region, nothing of its longtime disregard of international law nor of its refusal to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT, which now has 191 members, including Palestine).

**2 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.** Perry disappointingly says very little about the NPT (1968), and nothing about its important Art. VI requiring nuclear parties to begin ‘negotiations in good faith’ on: ‘an early end to the nuclear arms race’; nuclear disarmament; and a ‘Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control’. While he is critical (in other places) of the US ‘modernization’,<sup>11</sup> he never mentions the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and its courageous 2014 lawsuit in the International Court of Justice seeking compliance by the nuclear weapon states with Art. VI requiring nuclear disarmament negotiations. He does briefly mention the internationally respected abolition group, Global Zero, headed by friend and esteemed nuclear weapons expert, Bruce Blair, but not a word about Nuclear Zero and its parent, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, which supported the Marsahl Islands’ Court case from the beginning.<sup>12</sup> He regrets his ‘failed efforts’ at collaboration with Global Zero, explaining that the movement aims at a single treaty rather than taking his ‘gradual steps’ approach, though still guided by a ‘vision’ of a nuclear free world (p. 182).<sup>13</sup>

**3 Iraq.** Perry is rightly critical of the US invasion of Iraq (2003) which he calls a ‘quixotic invasion ... a major disaster’ (p. 178).<sup>14</sup> But it was also a major national/international deception and crime of aggression which greatly set back the consolidation of the UN and the building of respect for international law. In short, it took us several steps backwards towards a global Hobbesian state of nature. The Iraq invasion may also have made it tougher to make the case for non-proliferation. N. Korea’s ‘nuclear turn’ soon after ‘Shock and Awe’ may have had more to do with a fear of suffering Saddam’s fate than an appetite for regional conquest. Nukes will keep the ‘big boys’ at bay. After all, isn’t *their* national security built on Bombs?

**4 Russia.** Although Perry warned of damage to US-Russia relations from a premature eastward expansion of NATO and the emplacement of US missile defences near Russia, he does seem to place most of the blame on Russia for the ‘disastrous’ turn of events since 2014 (pp. 189-90). But both nations are ‘modernizing’ and testing (soon perhaps warhead testing), and, in times of mutual distrust, each nation’s ‘defensive’ build-up can expect a response of counter build-up. From Putin’s perspective, the NATO expansion (conceived by Clinton as early as 1993 and officially begun in 1996), is surely a betrayal of the US promise to Gorbachev (at Malta, 1990) that NATO would ‘not take advantage ... not one inch’ eastward.<sup>15</sup> Perry doesn’t get into this early history but (to his credit) he was strongly opposed to an early NATO expansion.

He does briefly recount the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but I think without due empathy for the Russian perspective. Here it’s wise to recall Bertrand Russell’s frequently used critical test of putting oneself in the other guy’s shoes and asking: ‘How must our “defensive” actions look to them?’ The NATO expansion to Russia’s borders and the installation of missile defences are good examples. So is the barely mentioned US involvement in and support for the illegal overthrow (2014) of the democratically elected Ukrainian president and his replacement with leadership hostile to Russia and resented by most of the pro-Russian eastern half of Ukraine.<sup>16</sup> Historical memory helps. It’s a good bet that the Russians haven’t forgotten the massive invasions of Russia by Poland (1920) and by Hitler (1941) – both via the Ukraine! Of course, it hardly justifies Russia’s annexation of Crimea (even if done with regional popular consent). Ideally, the disputants might have postponed a resort to violence and gone to the International Court of Justice for adjudication. But, alas, that requires a stronger, more democratic international system of the sort ultimately required by the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (one with ‘distasteful limitations of national sovereignty’) as a *sine qua non* for survival, but one never raised by Perry. In fact, he seems to assume a permanent imperial *pax Americana* (replete with its 750 military bases in 73 countries) as an acceptable global feature. This needs to be questioned. Here Russell’s perspective of ‘the other’ is surely prescribed.

Still, Perry’s book is a valuable one, not only for its important message, but also for its candid and respected messenger. And though his patriotic grounding may at times narrow a wiser supranational purview, we’re fortunate to have such a committed public servant on the side of nuclear sanity with a vision of a nuclear-free world.

*Ray Perkins Jr*

## Notes

- 1 Viz. former US Senator Sam Nunn and former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger (Nixon administrations) and George Shultz (Reagan and H.W. Bush administrations), Their group is the Nuclear Safety Project (NSP) along with its Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a non-partisan organization created and co-chaired by Sam Nunn and serves as coordinator of the NSP in conjunction with Stanford University's Hoover Institution.
- 2 See World Post, 20 Jan 2016: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-jperry/nuclear-catastrophe-risk\\_b\\_9019558.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-jperry/nuclear-catastrophe-risk_b_9019558.html)
- 3 He also rebukes the media's 'triumphal crowing' that Khrushchev had 'blinked' (p. 4). He reminds us (in retrospect) that it was K's decision to back down that 'spared the world from an unprecedented catastrophe' (a view similar to Bertrand Russell's and for which he was much maligned at the time; see *Unarmed Victory*, p. 53). Perry adds that the Crisis had the unanticipated effect of soon accelerating the arms race as the USSR attempted to close the missile gap (falsely claimed by the US administration to have been in the Soviets' favour despite an unreleased study concluding otherwise). He candidly admits that the defence business (including his own defence labs) prospered, and acknowledges with regret that the prosperity was 'directly tied to increased danger to our country and the world, a dichotomy that would come to haunt those of us in the industry'(p. 5).
- 4 On p. 158, he worries that an agreement may not come: 'In the nuclear crisis with Iran, time is not on our side'. Surprisingly, Perry doesn't mention Russia's help in keeping Iran at the table. Nor does he mention Russia's aid in getting Syria to give up its chemical weapons and join the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013.
- 5 It was only about a 10% reduction from START 2 (2007), but an 80% reduction from deployments just before the end of the Cold War (1989). But Perry rightly holds that there's room for much deeper cuts. (One should bear in mind that the US and Russia still have more than 90% of all nukes possessed by all nuclear armed states.)
- 6 Perry says little about the origins of Russia-Ukraine tensions and nothing about US involvement in the illegal ousting of a duly elected Ukrainian president. See: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/washington-was-behind-ukraine-coup-obama-admits-that-us-brokered-a-deal-in-support-of-regime-change/5429142>
- 7 Perry makes it sound like Russia's drop of 'no first use' was part of this recent 'backward slide'. Not so. It occurred in 1993 under Yeltsin when US-Russia relations were relatively good. The main reason was likely their sizeable conventional military inferiority (*vis a vis* US/NATO), as it was with the US during the Cold War. (The US still has no such policy, although Perry favours one, see n 9).

He doesn't say that the US and China also may resort to nuclear testing. But it might be politically easier for them than for Russia, which has ratified the

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (2000). The US and China, though so far compliant with the CTBT, are merely signatories (i.e. they are not legally bound). Clinton signed in 1996, but it was defeated for ratification (1999), and has not been back to the Senate since.

- 8 P.8; it's from a 1946 Einstein quote calling for 'new thinking', which Perry praises. But he doesn't mention the Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955) where two features of the 'new thinking' are elaborated: the abolition of war; and (as an urgent first step) the renunciation of nuclear weapons. Cf. Obama's remarks at Hiroshima (May 2016) reaffirming his 2009 commitment to a nuke-free world, adding, '[and] we must rethink war itself'.
- 9 Perry has also recently advocated a US 'no first use' policy and the removal of land-based ICBMs. See his blog on the William J Perry Project (<http://www.wjperryproject.org>).
- 10 Perry's book went to press at least a year before the attempted military coup in Turkey, which at the time held a portion of some 180 US nukes (including H-bombs) stored at 6 bases in 5 NATO countries. See Eric Schlosser's 'H-Bombs in Turkey', *The New Yorker*, July 17, 2016.
- 11 See his 'Notes from the Nuclear Brink', e.g. 'Kill the New Cruise Missile' (June 15, 2016), on his Blog (<http://www.wjperryproject.org>). Still, with less than complete coherence, in early 2010, he (and colleagues) argued for US nuclear 'modernization' to safeguard the US deterrent while significant disarmament agreements are being sought. See 'How to Protect Our Nuclear Deterrent', *WSJ* (Jan 19, 2010); and 'Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Proliferation', *WSJ* (March 7, 2011). See also David Krieger's (president, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation) well-reasoned response to the latter, in 'Nuclear Deterrence: Impeding Nuclear Disarmament', *WSJ* (March 11, 2011).
- 12 The ICJ ruled (5 October) that it has no jurisdiction in the lawsuits against Pakistan, India and UK (Court's vote was 9-7, 9-7, 8-8, respectively.) There is an RMI suit still pending against the US in US federal court. Unlike these three nations (and 67 others), the US no longer gives the ICJ compulsory jurisdiction; it was withdrawn in 1986 after the Court ordered the US to pay reparations for illegal actions against Nicaragua. See <http://www.cfr.org/courts-and-tribunals/united-states-icj/p26905>
- 13 This rationale I find unconvincing. Perry's 'vision', admittedly important for the 'steps' to actualize that ideal (abolition), could well be Global Zero's 'treaty'. Even if a treaty per Art. VI were never brought to conclusion, surely it's desirable that the Court mandate that the nuclear states begin negotiations – it's a 'step', and an important one, that the Republic of the Marshall Islands was seeking.
- 14 Perry had left as Secretary of Defense the year before Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, which officially approved support for Iraq regime change. Although it doesn't explicitly endorse US use of force it was cited by the Bush administration as permitting it. See Peters and Woolley, *The*

American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=55205>

15 See Robert Parry, 'How NATO jabs Russia on Ukraine', 15 May, 2014. (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/how-nato-jabs-russia-on-ukraine/5382467>)

16 See 'Washington was Behind Ukraine Coup', 3 Feb 2015. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/washington-was-behind-ukraine-coup-obama-admits-that-us-brokered-a-deal-in-support-of-regime-change/5429142>

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