

Reviews

On the River Thames

Harry Gosling, *Up and Down Stream*, with a new foreword by Ken Coates, published by Spokesman as a Trade Union Classic, with 20 illustrations, 300 pages including 20 illustrations, paperback ISBN 9780851247786, £19.95

It is to the great credit of Spokesman publishers that they have brought out a new edition of this outstanding book, first published in 1927. It is an autobiography of a trade union leader who was born in very humble circumstances nearly 150 years ago. But it is much more than an autobiography. It provides a gripping account of the trade union organisation of transport workers, particularly dockworkers, and draws lessons from every phase of the struggle. These lessons are still relevant today. *Up and Down Stream* is, indeed, much more than a compellingly interesting story of a man's life. It is in many ways a textbook for effective trade union organisation. My interest when reading it never faltered from the first page to the last.

Harry Gosling was born in 1861 in North Lambeth, very near to the south bank of the River Thames. His family life was bound up with work on the river. He could trace this connection back to his great grandfather, who was a bargeman, apprenticed in the 1780s. Harry continued the family tradition and became an apprentice when he was 14 years of age. He soon learnt that he had joined a group of workers who, conscious of their skill and mutual dependence on each other, had a strong sense of solidarity. Their work demanded both physical strength and skill. They depended upon each other for safety. His own words speak volumes:

‘One of their most pronounced traits is perhaps their inherent trust in each other ... The absolute dependence of one man on another creates a bond between them which is almost as strong as a blood tie ... The endless variety of circumstances, the change of wind and weather, the calls upon each other for help produce this ...’

Gosling conveys vividly the need for skill and care in navigating a busy river in a barge, sometimes towing logs, avoiding obstacles in a busy port, navigating passage under bridges, avoiding other craft, and checking and dealing constantly with changes in the weather, wind and tide.

In 1887, Harry Gosling fell ill and he was away from work on the river

for a period of about three years. He thus missed the historic dock strike of 1889. Nevertheless, he maintained his interest in his occupation and during his recovery he was asked to do some work for the Amalgamated Society of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames, which he had earlier joined. In 1890 he was elected president of the Lambeth branch and representative on the Executive Council. Early in 1893, he was elected as General Secretary of the union. In the same year he also attended the TUC for the first time as a delegate from his union. He recalls that the Congress had a 'full dress' debate on socialism and a resolution was carried in favour of independent labour representation.

During his period as General Secretary of his union, Harry Gosling played a leading role in securing improved working conditions on the river. As a result of the 1889 dock strike the working day for men and boys was reduced to 12, to be worked at any time between 6am and 8pm. Some of the companies sought to interpret the agreement to warrant a working day spread over 14 hours. This eventually led to a 17-week strike among the men in 1900 and a further strike in 1909. The apprentices' strike led to the appointment of an arbitrator by the Board of Trade. The apprentices' claim was upheld.

Harry Gosling was also politically active. He served on the London County Council for 27 years. His first attempt to secure election was in 1895, when he fought the riverside seat of Rotherhithe as a Labour-Progressive candidate, years before the formation of the Labour Party. He was unsuccessful. Three years later he was again unsuccessful when he stood for Clapham. Soon after, however, he was nominated for an aldermanic seat on the Council and, with the support of the small Labour group and the Progressives, he was elected.

In 1904, Harry Gosling was elected to the LCC for the East End constituency of St. George's and Wapping. It was a constituency which, in his own words, 'abounded in stories of hunger – hunger and hopelessness together'. Nevertheless he spoke well of the unselfishness of many of his constituents.

Harry Gosling was an LCC member at the time of the famous dispute affecting Poplar councillors. Because of its poverty and unemployment, Poplar had a very high level of rates. The residents were, in effect, paying to relieve their own poverty. Poplar was also required, as every other London borough, to pay precepts to the London County Council, the Metropolitan Police and the Metropolitan Asylum Board. Poplar's Labour councillors called for the equalisation of rates over the whole of London to meet all local services. To draw attention to the injustice under which they

were forced to levy extremely high rates on their own citizens, they decided not to levy rates to cover the central precepts.

The rebel councillors were ultimately sent to prison for contempt of court. Harry Gosling took a leading role in the campaign to secure their release. One of his collaborators was a young, able and energetic lawyer, W. H. Thompson (founder of the well-known law firm which, over many years right up to the present time, has rendered great service to the unions and to millions of working people). In the end a formula was found to secure the release of the imprisoned councillors.

One of the chapters in Harry Gosling's book is devoted to the establishment of the Port of London Authority. It was the subject of sharp political division. As far back as the year 1900 a Royal Commission had pointed out that the Port was in danger of losing part of its trade because of the inadequacies of its channels and docks. The numerous companies with interests in London shipping were unable to cope with the gigantic problem. In the words of Harry Gosling:

'In short, unification of control was an absolute necessity in order to end this disastrous state of affairs, and the Port of London Authority was created to save a vital national concern that capitalism and conflicting private interests had all but ruined.'

The PLA eventually came into existence in 1909. Lloyd George was influential in securing the much-needed reform.

Harry Gosling describes at length the struggle to achieve trade union federation among dockworkers and within the wider transport industries. It was not easy, particularly among groups with a strong craft identity. At times he even became impatient with some of his own members. It was Tom Mann, he recalls, who urged him, 'to stay where you are and bring them along with you'.

Gosling gives Ben Tillett, at that time the General Secretary of the Dockers' Union, the main credit for the formation of the National Transport Workers' Federation, in 1910-11. Gosling was elected President of the new Federation. It did good work, but was soon involved in a national dispute which led to a strike of more than 100,000 men. An agreement was finally secured which brought concessions to every section of port workers.

This, however, was not the end of the story. Some of the old problems remained unresolved and, in May 1912, the dispute re-opened. It led to a national strike, but the employers were determined not to make concessions. The men, according to Gosling, were eventually defeated by sheer starvation.

Gosling's view was that the unions failed in 1912 because a trade union federation, representing nearly thirty unions, each with its own executive council, was not always a suitable body to promote trade union solidarity in a national strike. His view on this weakness was strengthened by the failure known as 'Black Friday', in 1921, when the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers was no more than 'a glorified federation and as such it failed'. In 1921, Harry Gosling was the vice-chairman of the Triple Alliance and witnessed at first hand the defeat of the unions.

Harry Gosling was thus a firm advocate of trade union amalgamation. He was in no doubt that Ernest Bevin was mainly responsible for the success of establishing the Transport and General Workers' Union. He speaks of 'his extraordinary vigour and perseverance', and points out that considerable impetus was given to the transports workers' amalgamation by Bevin's advocacy before the Dockers' Court of Enquiry under Lord Shaw in 1921.

Lord Shaw produced a condemnatory report of conditions on the docks. He said that, 'the system of casualisation must, if possible, be torn up by the roots'. It was one of the most forthright reports ever published on labour conditions.

Harry Gosling became founding President of the T&GWU. It was a worthy tribute to his contribution to trade union unity. In 1923, he was elected to Parliament as a member for Whitechapel in the East End of London. In the following year, with the election of the first minority Labour Government, he was appointed Minister of Transport.

Throughout his trade union life Harry Gosling was a strong advocate of international solidarity and international institutions to promote social progress. He always spoke warmly, for example, of the work of the Independent Labour Organisation in seeking to promote better working conditions throughout the world, including collective bargaining, a short working week, the abolition of child labour, equal pay for work of equal value, and safe working conditions.

Harry Gosling's humanity was shown, also, in his wide range of interests. He helped to promote the Workers' Travel Association, he served on the Civil Service Arbitration Board, and was a member of the War Graves Commission. He spoke warmly of the decision that all graves, whatever the rank of the dead service-person, should be marked alike.

Harry Gosling died in 1930. He was still an MP. He deserves to be remembered as a good man, a fine trade unionist and a great credit to the class into which he was born and whose interests he so well represented.

I enjoyed this book immensely.

J. E. Mortimer

Power and ideology

Justin Fox, *The Myth of the Rational Market: A History of Risk, Reward, and Delusion on Wall Street*, Harriman House, 2009, 382 pages, hardback ISBN 9781906659691, £18.99.

Jérôme Gautié and John Schmitt, editors, *Low-Wage Work in the Wealthy World*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2010, 486 pages, hardback ISBN 9780871540614, \$45

Mary Mellor, *The Future of Money; From Financial Crisis to Public Resource*, Pluto Press, 2010, 198 pages, paperback ISBN 9780745329949, £17.99

What a sorry state we are in. From low wages to financial speculation, backed up by theoretical nonsense about how rational it all is supposed to be. These books, in their different ways, demonstrate the power of ideology behind the alleged ‘science’ of economics. They are powerful contributions to an understanding of the structure of economies, the structure of income, and the role of money – money itself being not just an abstract denominator of exchange value but also a political instrument.

Part of the ideology is the myth of ‘not bucking the market’. One could add that, if the market produces what is described in these three books, we should think again. But it is not so straightforward. Let us consider this in more detail.

(1) *Money, and the power of debt; or, philosophy and economics*

Mellor alleges that the state surrendered its role of creating money to the private sector – borrowing and indebtedness. I am not so sure that this is such a recent event since the old merchant banking families, such as the Italian Lombards, and then the Rothschilds, made their money, either raising it for governments fighting European or civil wars (Lombards), or speculating on gilts (Rothschild) in the event of Napoleonic defeat. This was the private sector at its free-market best. But what did it all produce, or endorse? War, one supposes. So the markets in debt and securities were based on financing conflict, as I suggest is the situation currently. Nothing has really changed for a thousand years. It’s not ‘capitalism’, but the use of finance for aggressive means.

At the same time as I was reading these books, I started to read Michael Mansfield’s autobiography, *Memoirs of a Radical Lawyer*. It hit the nail on the head. He comments on the miners’ strike and its aftermath (he defended the strikers at Orgreave Colliery who faced apparent trumped-up

charges). His descriptions echoed the themes of these three books.

‘But the much-acclaimed victory of capital, and the demise of union power, has been a hollow and short-lived affair. It heralded unmitigated privatisation, untrammelled deregulation, and the growth of a society built on asset-stripping, self-interest and a culture of unabashed bonanza bonuses.’ (p.84)

This from a respected QC.

(2) *Theoretical underpinnings*

The analysis is about the role and definition of ‘market’. This is a fascinating concept to explore.

Mellor’s book is slightly tedious and misses the point. I wrote in the margin at one point that it was a glorified book review, but there are some insights. Many of the facts and references are well known. She explains perfectly the diminished role of the state versus the private sector in finance. But is it diminished? One could argue that the role of the state is, or has had to be, more prominent than ever – bailing out the collapsed rational market theory which underpins modern definitions of risk and reward. Fox reminds us, in a social-anthropological fashion, detailing who was who in the construction of an economic theory which became ascendant in governments and academia during the rise of financial market dominance, that it was almost religious. It was based on *a priori* assumptions about the random decisions of countless others always proving right if only the state would get out of the way: the rule of the market. In this reviewer’s opinion, the ‘market’ as a concept is political.

For example, as Mellor pleads,

‘Money is too important to be left to the market.’ (p.30)

I was not sure what this meant, unless one looks at power structures.

The books, jointly, explain the chaos, although there are no surprises.

(3) *Consequences for people*

The role of class in the analysis of the market

What emerges is that the so-called market is not a random collection of rational people maximising their utility, but a structure of exploitation. This may sound obvious to readers, but the books prove it, yet again. The Chicago School, led by Milton Friedman, whose lectures attracted audiences like a rock star, explained in Fox’s exposition of personalities in this economic cock-up, went on to screw up Chile, that is, privatise pensions (with plaudits from the World Bank, endorsed by US Secretary of

State), introduce massive discrimination against women, while condoning the killing of 9,000 citizens, although this crime against humanity is not mentioned in any of the books.

The rational market was dependent on military rule and violence against radicals and trade unions. The market, if it exists as its advocates would like, is basically inhuman. This is the inference from the books.

The low-wage report considers, in particular, Denmark, Germany, France, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. There are some surprising results, which appear to demonstrate the power of labour in confronting market ‘rationality’, despite declining union membership in all of these countries. Denmark apparently shows how the market and social partners can work together. But the table on page 106 reveals that there is no National Minimum Wage but a national wage floor – which some firms do not implement. In Germany ‘an increasing number of firms are withdrawing from industry collective agreements’.

Mellor goes on to explain the all-important role of debt. The low wage book explains, by implication, who pays for it, the rational market book outlines how we delude ourselves about the motives of the key actors. My commentary is that the ideology, or hegemony, of finance has distributional consequences. What some call ‘financialisation’, like a cultural phenomenon or disease, is nothing of the sort. It is about a power structure, backed up by an ideology, a creed.

Mellor states that money/finance is based on trust, and the market cannot provide it.

‘Money circulation through the financial system is seen as the outcome of private economic acts, not as a function of social relationships and public authority.’ (p. 2)

To conclude, we should examine very carefully the use of concepts such as ‘market’, ‘rationality’, ‘risk’, ‘finance’, ‘wage’ and ‘class’. Most of all we should look at the actual structure of finance and the labour relations behind it all. The use of language is important, and disguises power relations and distributional issues.

There is more to be written.

Richard Minns

Reference

Michael Mansfield, *Memoirs of a Radical Lawyer*, (with Yvette Vanson), Bloomsbury, 2009

Attlee

Attlee's Great Contemporaries, edited by Frank Field, Continuum, 240 pages, hardback ISBN 9780826432247, £17.99

This is a delightful collection of articles, published between 1951 and 1966, mainly in *The Observer*, and written in the style of Attlee the statesman, 'terse, telling and to the point', as Peter Hennessy puts it in the epilogue. There are three threads running through them: Attlee's relationships with Churchill, the United States, and the Labour Party. One should not be fooled by the austere image of Attlee. It is just that, an image, no less than the self-propagated, more flamboyant image of Churchill.

Today, we are well aware that a politician's character and public image can be far apart; a growing gap which has contributed to the public distrust of the whole political class. The editor, Frank Field, suggests that in politics character is all, and asks us to compare the characters of Attlee and Churchill. The book's title echoes one of Churchill's own books, *Great Contemporaries* (implying in Churchill's case, presumably, that I am great and these are my contemporaries.)

The subtitle is 'the politics of character'. Field's thesis, expressed in an introductory essay, is that the key to successful political leadership is character. He quotes Attlee approvingly:

'there are many men who find it impossible to believe that men lead other men other than by example of moral and physical courage: sympathy, self-discipline, altruism, and superior capacity for hard work.'

Field argues that Attlee drew his sense of 'duty, loyalty and responsibility' from being brought up in the Anglican Church and his belief in Christian ethics. Yet, as Kenneth Harris points out in his biography of Attlee, one thing Attlee learned at Haileybury was that he did not believe in God: 'So far as I was concerned it was mumbo-jumbo'.¹

So where do Attlee's ethics come from? Kenneth Morgan charts Attlee's intellectual conversion from a young conservative into a socialist, via Carlyle's study of *Chartism*, Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, and the writings of William Morris. Indeed, Attlee's favourite passage came from *A Dream of John Ball*,

'Forsooth, brothers. Fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell, fellowship is life and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds you do upon this earth it is for fellowship's sake ye do them.'

Attlee was a great lover of literature and poetry. One of the most telling pieces, which gives a great insight into Attlee's 'character', is *The Pleasure of Books*. Here he describes his library and how much his books are like a collection of old friends, and what they mean to him. He was of the generation that not only enjoyed Morris's prose but also his poetry, which many of us, today, find hard going. He had few rare books or first editions; for him books were for reading, not collecting. But he did have three books by Morris from the Kelmscott Press, 'the gift of some kind friends in the socialist movement, who knew where my love abided'.

One of the reasons Attlee wrote these pieces was because he needed the money to house his library. He had given up his own home in 1945, on moving into Downing Street, because of the housing shortage. Yet, sensing his political mortality, and looking forward to only a modest pension, as Field puts it, he and Vi sought a new home. 'Whatever else this house needed, a primary purpose for Attlee was to house his books.'

Attlee was a complex personality who rose to be Prime Minister, yet, in his early political life, he could not get elected to Stepney Borough Council. He had done the hard yards as a street corner orator, discovering in the process the people he most admired: 'those who did the tedious jobs, collecting our exiguous subscriptions, trying to sell literature, and carrying the impoverished platform from one street corner to another. They got no glamour. They did not expect to see victory, but uncomplainingly, they worked to try and help the cause.'² Maybe he sounds so passionate about the foot soldiers in the movement, having been one of them himself.

Attlee called himself a socialist, but of what kind? His 'socialism' was, as he points out in his autobiography when writing about the Independent Labour Party, 'a way of life rather than an economic dogma'. He believed, like Keir Hardie, that a party based on the simple object of getting Labour representatives into Parliament was 'bound in time to become socialist'.³

The most telling contributions to this collection, which includes a wide range of pieces, are those on Churchill and the wartime generals, which reveal Attlee's view of the United States, and those on Labour figures. The relationship with Churchill is a major theme, and Attlee certainly has the measure of him: 'He was always looking around for "finest hours" and if one was not immediately available, his impulse was to manufacture one.' (p.161)

In his reviews of the memoirs of Generals Allenbrooke, Montgomery and Marshall he lets us know his views of the United States. He feels they were so obsessed with the British Empire they missed out on the growing Russian one: 'The Americans were indeed innocents abroad. It is ironical

to reflect when one considers their present attitude to the Communist peril, how much they contributed to its extension westward’.

There are excellent portraits of Hardie, Lansbury and Bevan, but the most telling one is of Ernest Bevin. They were a formidable team. Bevin was for Attlee the embodiment of a ‘Labour representative in parliament’. In ‘A Man of Power’, in this collection, Attlee points out that,

‘The main thing that Bevin did for the Labour movement was to create and harness power for it, and by constantly stating the trades unions’ point of view keep the Labour Party’s feet on the ground’.

It makes one wonder what is the point of the modern Labour Party, and where exactly its feet are placed.

We should not be fooled by Attlee’s apparent modesty. He was well aware of his worth and intelligence. As Christopher Hollis observed,

‘In a world in which so many people pretend to be more important than they are, the British people has, I think, shown its wisdom and generosity in taking to its heart a man who spends his time pretending to be less important than he is.’⁴

Nick Matthews

References

- 1 Atlee, Kenneth Harris, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1982,p10
- 2 Atlee, Kenneth Harris, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1982, p33.
- 3 As It Happened, C.R.Attlee, William Heinemann, 1954, pp33&34.
- 4 Atlee, Kenneth Harris, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1982, p553.

Saving Capitalism?

Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things They Don’t Tell You About Capitalism*, Allen Lane, 304 pages, hardback ISBN 9781846143281, £20

The basic assumption of this clever little book is that capitalism has taken a wrong route since the 1980s, in embracing totally the so-called ‘neo-liberal’ faith in the unregulated global market. Chang, who is a Reader in the Political Economy of Development at Cambridge University, has identified 23 ways in which, so we are frequently told, globalised capitalism works to produce a more effective and better world economy. All of these he demonstrates are manifestly false. The list of what Chang calls the 23 ‘things’, which are false, is an interesting one, and worth recapitulating:

There is no such thing as a free market. Companies should not be run in the interest of the owners. The washing machine has changed the world (for women – MBB) more than the Internet. Assume the worst about people, and you get the worst. Macro-economic stability has not made the world more stable. Free market policies rarely make poor countries rich. Capital is national. We do not live in a post-industrial age. The US does not have the highest living standard in the world. Africa is not destined for under-development. Governments can pick winners. Making rich people richer does not make us all richer. US managers are over-priced. People in poor countries are more entrepreneurial than people in rich countries. We are not smart enough to leave things to the market. More education in itself is not going to make a country richer. What is good for General Motors is not necessarily good for the United States. Despite the fall of Communism, we are not living in planned economies. Equality of opportunity may not be fair. Big government makes people more open to change. Financial markets need to become less, not more, efficient. Good economic policy does not require good economists.

This is an odd mix of denials of what goes for contemporary economic wisdom. The most important is the denial, not only of the morality but also of the effectiveness, of reliance on the free global market, with minimal government interference. Chang has the evidence of the financial and economic crisis, first of the late 1990s and then of 2008-9, to support his view. And it is incredible that anyone should go on believing that, after the latest crisis, the old free market system can be revived. Chang's book should be a useful antidote.

What is missing in the book, however, is a more fundamental criticism of capitalism. Chang assumes that capitalism could be made to work, with less reliance on the market and less financial activity, and more state intervention and regulation. But capitalism resists regulation and generates inequality – between owners of capital and wage slaves – and inequality generates financial activity including increasing speculation. All that there was, which for many years restrained capitalist excesses, was the threat of an alternative in the Soviet Union. When that collapsed in the 1980s, it was just then that capital owners felt free to open up the market, let inequality increase, and financial speculation run riot.

There is now nothing to stop this happening again. Indeed, at the end of 2010 we can already see it happening. There are no wage slaves' movements of revolt that seem likely to create a political atmosphere in which Chang's proposals for income redistribution, state regulation and financial control could be introduced in any of the developed capitalist economies, or in those developing such as China, India and Brazil. All are

desperately looking to protect themselves individually from the worst effects of a rotten system. A fundamental challenge to capitalism, such as Marx envisaged, seems even more remote. Perhaps, the threat of climate change to the whole survival of the planet might alter things, but this is an eventuality that Chang does not consider, and there are clear signs that the deniers of planetary disaster believe that somehow they, or the better placed among them, can survive in a world where half the population is dying.

The fact is that there are another two or three things, in addition to Chang's 23, which they do not tell you about capitalism. The first is that the system has no built-in means for changing course. (Marx believed that an organised working class would provide that; it didn't.) And the second is that capitalism's reliance on the competitive instinct in human beings is undervaluing the co-operative instinct which alone might ensure the planet's survival. A third and fundamental omission is any denial of the popular view of capitalism that human beings are made up of a few very clever and imaginative ones and a large number of much less clever and less imaginative, and recognition rather of a very wide range of different kinds of cleverness and imagination which just need the opportunity to express themselves. Such opportunities are simply not created by the workings of capitalism; indeed they are very widely suppressed by poverty, ill health and lack of education in a majority of the world's population, even including at least a quarter of those in the most developed capitalist economies. A massive attack on these evils might make a big difference. So, we had better concentrate on that.

Michael Barratt Brown

Housing

Sarah Glynn (editor), *Where the other half lives: lower income housing in a neoliberal world*, Pluto Press, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 978-0745328584, £60, paperback ISBN 9780745328577 £17.99

Neoliberalism hastens a return to unfettered market provision of housing and the uncontrolled physical development of urban space. There are two forms: so-called 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberalism. The first, the roll-back version, involves reducing the role of the state through active promotion of individual purchase of public housing or mass stock transfer to private or semi-private organisations. The second, the 'roll-out' version,

extends market principles into public housing provision in various ways: increasing public rents to market/near-market levels; reducing security of tenure or making it conditional (on having paid work, for example); using the insecurity generated by clearance programmes to contain dissent and protest against ‘regeneration’ (gentrification) of potentially lucrative parts of cities or towns.

The first part of this collection provides more detail about what the editor, Sarah Glynn, calls ‘the neoliberal project’, and also a theoretical grounding (in a form of *élite* theory), which is taken up to varying degrees by the other contributors. This is followed by accounts from England, Scotland, France, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Canada. These countries are all older industrialized ones from North West Europe and the ‘Anglophone nations’. They share many ‘basic characteristics’ and are ‘frequently used as models of neo-liberalism’, especially in relation to development models being promoted in Eastern Europe and Russia (p5). The case-study authors each give a brief outline of their country’s housing policy to provide sufficient context for the more detailed account of how the physical and social fabric of their city, region or country is being transformed by the practical implementation of neoliberal approaches to housing. They also emphasize the resistance to these changes, where this exists. This links into the remaining two chapters of the book, which focus on ways in which neoliberal practices have been or are being challenged.

It is only possible to give the briefest indication here of the detail of the eight case-study chapters which form the core of the book, and its strength. Cumulatively, they show that public assets in the form of social or public housing, land and amenities are immensely valuable not just as commodities (which is the neoliberal view) but also in relation to working class culture, politics, education and health. These collectively-owned assets have been and are under considerable threat in all the countries included in this book.

In the United States, the tiny public sector has been subject to ‘roll-back’ and ‘roll-out’ neoliberal policy interventions since the 1980s. The current HOPE VI programme (described in detail) embodies substantial demolition of public housing; linking security of tenure to work in various ways; giving vouchers to tenants for them to use in finding private rented housing when homes are demolished rather than rehousing them in public housing; transferring responsibility for management (including increased powers of eviction) from federal government to public housing authorities (PHAs) which are far from accountable. If this represents the extreme,

strong resonances can be seen in all the accounts from other countries.

In England and Scotland, mass stock transfer to the semi-private and private sectors has been pursued by Conservative and New Labour governments since 1980, along with substantial stock loss through the promotion of individual tenant purchase (the ‘right to buy’). The detailed case-studies of Leeds and Dundee respectively analyse the implementation of a housing Private Finance Initiative scheme and describe how ‘regeneration’ is being used as a cover for gentrification of Dundee into the ‘City of Discovery’.

From the 1990s, New Zealand also experienced an extreme version of ‘roll out’ neoliberalism (mass stock transfer, individual sales, market rents) but this country provides evidence that there may be political limitations to ‘the neoliberal project’. Since 2000, the approach has ‘softened’: rental affordability is now a political issue. There is similar evidence from other countries where political administrations have changed political hue (for example, in Ontario, Canada). But, of course, in England, New Labour has been succeeded by a Conservative/Liberal coalition government which is pursuing this path with even more determination.

The changes to the housing systems described in this book are substantial. Opposing and reversing them is a difficult task. For this reason, the contributors have provided substantial detail about opposition to these changes: initiatives, campaigning and information sources. These are very valuable resources for tenants’ groups, activists and academics concerned to change what is happening through activism, teaching and writing.

Cathy Davis

Keir Hardie

Bob Holman, *Keir Hardie – Labour’s Greatest Hero?*, Lion Hudson plc, 224 pages, paperback ISBN 9780745953540, £10.99

A while ago, I was watching Newsnight Scotland when who should appear but Bob Holman. It was at the time of Iain Duncan Smith’s announcement of his ‘biggest shake-up’ of the welfare system since Beveridge. Bob was somehow persuaded to do some work for Duncan Smith’s Centre for Social Justice. Now, there’s an Orwellian title for a Tory think-tank. It would probably be close to the mark if I interpreted Bob’s response as being horrified at the thought that his participation could in any way be

accepted as some sort of support for that old Tory slander that the victims of unemployment should be punished for their condition.

Bob Holman has recently published a very readable biography of Keir Hardie, 'Labour's Greatest Hero?' Hardy was indeed well aware of the capacity of the capitalist political system to incorporate leading working class spokespersons to add credibility and breadth to their appeal to the electorate. In fact, Bob provides an acute analysis of two aspects of Hardie's intellectual make-up which were affected by this dichotomy. These were his Christian beliefs and his socialist commitments. Sadly, it is a truism that many churchgoers profess Christian beliefs but do not behave as Christians, and many members of the Labour Party proclaim their support for socialism, but don't ask them to support it in office.

Hardie's pursuit of both sources of hypocrisy was never diverted by naivety; when it came to firing arrows of derision at the pious factory owner he rarely missed his target. He also was a marksman of pinpoint accuracy when it came to those who took the Lib-Lab shilling, which strangely made them lose their tongues when it came to condemning mine owners who placed profits before miners' safety. Bob Holman provides much well researched material from newspaper articles, some of which appeared in Hardie's own *Labour Leader*.

Hardie never got round to producing an autobiography, although there have been several biographies. Bob's is different in many ways in that he explores the difficulties and deprivations confronting Keir Hardie, and his long suffering wife Lillie, as he pursued his peaceful social revolution without regular resources to do so. Holman also provides an antidote to the lies of the Tory and Liberal press barons about Hardie's supposed wealth and his dourness. Unsurprisingly, Hardie did enjoy a good ceilidh, but in the company of his ain folk.

Hardie left his home in Cumnock to his family, as well as the £96 still due from his parliamentary salary. Doesn't this put the recent corruption of parliament robbing the public through their expenses claims all in some perspective? What would Hardie have said today? He probably wouldn't have been allowed into the Party, and, even if he was, the careerists would not have allowed him anywhere near the leadership.

In 1898, at the Independent Labour Party conference, Keir Hardie expounded the Party's attitude to armed conflict:

'War in the past was inevitable when the sword constituted the only court of appeal. But the old reasons for war have passed away, and, the reasons gone, war should go also. Today they fight to extend markets, and no empire can stand based solely on the sordid considerations of trade and commerce. This is

running the empire on the lines of an huckster's shop, and making our statesmen glorified bagmen.'

What would Hardy say of Blair's visit to India to sell arms on behalf of BAE, or four Coalition ministers visiting China on a sales mission to the country that already has everything including our debt?

Hardie had a great interest in international affairs and, for a man of his class, was well travelled, having attended the great socialist international conferences and made the acquaintance of the great socialist leaders of his time. I have a picture in my mind of the delegates at the Second International in Paris, in 1889, turning in their seats to see who it was that had just introduced himself as the delegate on behalf of the Ayrshire Miners. It is sad to think that we now have Labour Members of the European Parliament, fully funded, who, unlike Hardie, can be in Brussels in an hour. In a century's time, will they have a Bob Holman reaching for his pen and finding a rich and inspiring story like that of the illegitimate Scottish miner who founded a political movement against all the odds? What, indeed, would Hardie say?

Henry McCubbin

Credit Crunch

John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis: Causes and Consequences*, Monthly Review Press 2009, 160 pages, paperback ISBN 9781583671849, £10.95

At one level this book could be seen as an important extension of the ideas of Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy as published in their 1966 classic work, *Monopoly Capital*. The book attempts to bring up to date Baran and Sweezy's thinking in the light of the neo-liberal counter-revolution and the metamorphosis of capitalism itself. The focus of the book is still, however, the present crisis, universally known as the 'Credit Crunch'. In fact, as a demonstration of the perspicacity of the authors, the first four chapters are taken from previous issues of *Monthly Review* magazine over the period May 2006 to April 2007, with only the two final chapters written specifically for the book. Unlike our exalted leaders, the authors clearly saw that the debt bubble was about to burst.

In order to place the book in the correct context, therefore, it is necessary to touch briefly upon the basic ideas of Baran and Sweezy. Their fundamental appraisal of capitalism after the depression of the 1930s and

the conclusion of the Second World War was that competitive market capitalism had been transformed into 'monopoly capitalism': a capitalism determined by giant corporations, mainly US, who no longer competed through cut-throat price competition but orchestrated an oligopolistic competitive market through internal cost-cutting, marketing, and product innovation, together with increased productivity, often utilising improved production methods. This process led to the accumulation of large surpluses which, given capitalism's insatiable proclivities, restlessly aspired to multiply through further profitable investment. By the late 1960s, such investment was beginning to look decidedly thin. This form of managed capitalism, which manipulated sector pricing and other factors, had resulted in productive overcapacity, and hence a difficult environment for profitable investment. This led to a generalised stagnation of the economy with real wages insufficient to take up the slack. Therefore, in spite of temporary booms followed by bust, the normal state of capitalism is one of stagnation through under-consumption.

The only solution for this stagnation malaise was the extension of credit on a massive scale, and to areas where it was previously largely absent at an organised corporate level – to the working and lower middle classes. Credit cards and store cards were handed out like confetti whilst, in the financial centres, innovative and arcane techniques for making money out of money were devised: the hedge fund, derivatives, futures, leveraged buyouts, etc. For the authors, this new twist to the economic situation, as described above, means that debt is now such an integral part of the system that they consider 'monopoly capitalism' has become 'monopoly finance capital'. Necessarily, they now investigate the growth of personal and corporate debt in the context of the US economy in some detail, plus the mechanisms and consequences of 'financialisation'.

Naturally enough, the first chapter discusses the problem of household debt and the sub-prime mortgage débâcle in the context of the ever-increasing structural wage inequality found in the US workforce. Since the late 1970s, equipped with their neo-liberal 'insights', Thatcher and Reagan had imposed what David Harvey has called a regime of 'wage repression' so that, by the start of the credit binge, real wages had fallen, and they have remained repressed to the present day. Examining the conundrum of falling real wages and yet no reciprocal fall in consumer spending, the authors insist that the shortfall could only be made up through borrowing. Of course, this extension of mortgage credit was predicated on ever-rising prices in the housing market, but also the 'securitisation' of this debt through a piece of financial sleight of hand, using a novel instrument called

the collateralised debt obligation (CDO). The latter wizardry was only one in a whole series of innovative financial free market devices calculated to allow increased indebtedness whilst deferring the consequences.

The Great Financial Crisis provides real insights into the explosion of speculation and debt in the US economy, which began its precipitous rise at the beginning of the 1980s. What the authors mean by financialisation is a switch from the making of profits mainly by producing goods to, primarily, profits being made out of finance itself, so that by 2005 financial profits as a percentage of total US domestic profits constituted 40%. The book touches on the connection between the US defence industry, the new strident imperialism and an America which wishes to secure economic hegemony over other trade blocs and secure raw material supply, (in particular oil), and how this fits into the overall financialisation picture.

In general, *The Great Financial Crisis* does suffer from a degree of US parochialism in the sense that the present crisis cannot be understood completely from a US only perspective. There is, for instance, no discussion of the rivalry between advanced industrialised nations. Another possible weakness is that the under-consumption thesis regarding capitalism has been criticised for mixing up cause and effect. Other Marxists have come up with alternative theories for the continuing malaise of capitalism. Robert Brenner has identified overproduction and overcapacity of manufacturing worldwide, leading to low investment and falling profits. What we can all hopefully agree on is that we are facing, as the book would describe it, a capitalism that, whilst still having its fundamental drives intact, has metamorphosed yet again from monopoly capital to monopoly finance capital. Manufacturing, certainly in the United States and Britain at least, has lost its primacy, and the paramount role in profit-making is now finance in its many forms. This is particularly noticeable in the case of Britain where the willingness to please the 'City' seems to be mandatory for the media and politicians, at the expense of investment in manufacturing industry.

Without a doubt, the financial élite, after a brief dalliance with Keynesianism, seems determined to return to the old habits. *The Great Financial Crisis* provides the clarity to expose that élite's insatiable appetites and resist its drive to make us all pay for its profligacy. It is one of many stimulating accounts on the present crisis from the Marxist and other points of view. It is definitely one of the clearest expositions of the continuing credit crisis, and deserves to be read for the comprehensiveness of its approach as well as the cogency of its argument.

John Daniels

Armenia

Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention*, Manchester University Press, 258 pages, hardback ISBN 9780719078170, £60

It is a challenging task to choose a pictorial or graphic front page/jacket image for a book with a title such as the above. Yet Lois Raemaekers' *Detail from Armenia* of 1917 somehow sets the tone for the contents and conclusions of this book. It is the image of a corpulent mother figure, with scarf covered head, in a quasi Rodin-esque thinking pause, lost in the dilemma of her whereabouts and 'what to do next', with her youngster beside her facing the onlooker with bewildered eyes piercing the unknown. Raemaekers' image, which appeared then as *The Lord Mayor of London Appeals for Help* poster, is also reproduced in the book. As if delineating this same image, Joanne Laycock, now a Post-doctoral Fellow in Armenian Studies at the University of Michigan concludes her impressive study, saying:

Despite the coming of independence in 1991 the ambiguous image of Armenia is still embedded in complex power relations as Armenia continues to negotiate a place in the post-Soviet world. (p.228)

Perusing the *Introduction*, I felt Laycock was very much engulfed in the condescending aura of some of the Armenian American historians emulating bygone *Orientalists*, those targeted by E. Said's criticism. She has quoted (p.5) the following characteristic remark of R.G. Suny:

Often directed toward an 'ethnic' rather than a broader international or scholarly audience, Armenian historical writing has been narrowly concerned with fostering a positive view of an endangered nationality ... Criticism has been avoided as if it might aid present enemies and certain kinds of inquiry have been shunned as betrayals of the national cause. (*Constructing Primordialism*, p. 2)

No surprise, then, the absence from this study of Armenian history written in the Armenian language the exception being the Russian edition of A. J. Kirakossian's *Great Britain and the Armenian Question: 1890s*, published in Yerevan in 1990, and the same Kirakossian as editor to *The Armenian Massacres, 1894-1896*, published in Detroit in 2004. Also, Laycock's last Chapter, *Post-war Armenia*, has three quotes from British Aid workers, found in the Armenian National Archives which leads the Primary Sources, abbreviated in the *Notes* as NAA.

My initial impression, though, did somehow yield its relevance to the impact I gathered from the multi-layered construction of her thesis. She has essentially examined the portrayal in Britain of Armenia and the Armenians during the 19th and 20th centuries. Hence, she could have probably felt in tune with some aspects of Levon A. Bayramian's pioneering book in Armenian, published in Yerevan in 1982, entitled *Western Armenia in The Plans of English Imperialism*. Yet Bayramian's book is an absentee from Laycock's study.

Before Said's *Orientalism* became a household name in Academia, a couple of Armenian writers did indulge in classifying aspects of what 'others' – non Armenians – have presented Armenia and the Armenians, the latter being in their own turn the 'other' to the non Armenians, as, for example, *Armenia Observed*, ed. by Ara Baliozian (1979), and *As Others See Us*, by Leo Hamalian (1980), both in English. Christopher Waker's *Visions of Ararat* (1997), a collection of exclusively British writing on Armenia, was a welcome addition to the genre. The latter book has deserved a mention as 'a notable exception' by Laycock in her *Introduction* (p.4).

While recording nineteenth century impressions of Armenian architecture, including the admiration of Layard (*Discoveries*, 1850, p.33) and Lynch (*Armenia*, 1902, p.371), Jo Laycock has felt the importance of mentioning, in her corresponding *Notes* (p.92), the work of Josef Strsygovski, the noted Viennese professor. But, alas, the matter is discussed without the crucial Armenian primary source.

The renowned architect and scholar of antiquities, Toros Toramanian (1864-1934), was a pioneer of architectural studies in Armenia during the late 19th century and early 1900s. It is a well known fact that Toramanian met Strsygovski twice, in Vienna and in Armenia, handing over most of his architectural research sketches and copious manuscripts of his studies to Strsygovsky, long before the appearance of the latter's monumental work, *Die Baukunst Der Armenier und Europe*, of 1918. Strsygovsky failed to indicate that major source of his research, and his work is labelled by Christina Moranci as:

highly political and offensive work which linked Indo-European thought to Architecture. (*Medieval Armenian Architecture*, p. 1, quoted by Jo Laycock, p. 92).

The necessity of such criticism was long overdue since the entrenchment of William Jones' pronouncement of 1786 that European and Indian languages such as Greek, Latin and Sanskrit must have sprung from a

common proto-language, hence the name *Indo-European*. As language and architecture were thought to exemplify both national and cultural identities, the concept of a proto-language became a major attraction for Orientalist discourse, including Strsygovsky's.

Yet, Toramanian, whose remaining research manuscripts and sketches were posthumously published – entitled *Armenian Architecture*, by the Armenian SSR Academy, Yerevan, in two monumental volumes, 1942 (v.1), 1948, (v.2) – specifically mentions the following in his own introductory notes:

It is obvious that nothing decisive yet exists pertaining the proto-language of today's many existing languages, but for which hypothetical assumptions more than certainties abound. (v 2, p.3):

Such crucial differences of opinion between primary sources indicate the importance of not neglecting Armenian original sources, such as Toramanian and many others, especially when dealing with, and even *imagining* about, a country, its people and its culture. That might have perhaps somehow lessened the projected *ambiguity* of the tale, even when narrated skillfully through the notes of 'others', distinguished as they were.

Significantly, Laycock's *Imagining Armenia* is an imaginative study of the permutations of the concept of the 'other' in relation to Britain and Armenia during a turbulent historical period, culminating in the First World War and the genocide of the Armenians. She uses, perhaps unwittingly, but surely with much profit, what Edward Said, the renowned author of *Orientalism* (1978), had suggested in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) to read history and culture 'contrapuntally'. Laycock's contrapuntal analysis of her theses is enlightening, notwithstanding occasional repetitions of the same in various chapters as if paying her debt to counterpoint's initial style of 'imitation'.

Imagining Armenia consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. With all the scholarly sophistication, judiciously manipulated to write her book, the author has not failed to tell us a fascinating story about a land, a country and its people as perceived and portrayed, often with ambiguity, by the British, whether writers, travellers, historians, philanthropers and government officials, not forgetting the effect of the contradictory colonial politics of the British empire on the destiny of the land called Armenia and the future of its people, the Armenians.

Khatchatur I. Pilikian

Keep Talking

Mark Perry, *How to Lose the War on Terror*, Hurst Publishers 2010, 270 pages, hardback ISBN 9781850659624, £37.45, paperback ISBN 9781850659631, £12.99

This is a book which gets more and more interesting as the pages turn. It started life as a series of articles in the *Asian Times* in 2005. Then it developed into a book project when the author became involved, in 2005 and 2006, in attempts to dialogue with the Sunni resistance in northern Iraq. It became a full-blown book after further involvement with Hamas and Hezbollah leaders in Palestine and Lebanon.

The message which runs through it all is clear: 'Jaw Jaw is better than War War'. Perhaps, granted the hints now emerging from Afghanistan of talks with the Taliban, we are beginning, at last, to learn that lesson there. We ought to have learnt it decades ago during the Northern Ireland civil war.

The book starts with a very good quotation from that remarkable historian Barbara Tuchman:

'To halt the momentum of an accepted idea, to re-examine assumptions, is a disturbing process and requires more courage than Governments can usually summon'.

The entrenched idea in this case is that military power can defeat armed resistance which has some level of popular support. It can't. Sooner or later there have to be talks with 'the enemy'. There are always differing political aims, which have to be faced. Slapping labels on insurgents and calling them terrorists only manufactures yet more real terrorists.

The author's experience in Northern Iraq several years after the 2003 invasion is fascinating. It was, in fact, the United States military and the Civil Affairs group who responded to an invitation from some influential Iraqi exiles in Amman. Their up-front aim was to help to rebuild the Iraqi economy, but discussions went much further than that. So far, in fact, that hostile but significant people such as Paul Wolfowitz slammed down the shutters with a vengeance and humiliated the officials involved. His understanding of the situation, and I am sure others shared his ideas, was simple: 'Don't you know that these people are all Nazis'?

The official United States line was that there could be no talks with those they defined as terrorists. That is not even true according to their own past practice. The PLO and ANC and the opposition in Iraq were all called terrorists in their time, but US discussions went on with them nevertheless.

The chapters on Hamas, Hezbollah and Israel all tell the same story. There is an interesting quotation from a senior Hamas leader about the explicit clause in their Charter calling for the destruction of Israel, which is hardly compatible, anyway, with the Hamas offer of a ten-year truce. Says he: 'The Charter is not the Koran - it can be amended'.

There might have been a very different story to tell about the Middle East if the United States had not mounted such heavy opposition to the democratic result of the 2006 Palestinian elections. All CIA stops, at the orders of President Bush, were pulled out to make a Fatah/Hamas partnership impossible. Hamas leaders wanted to talk but their terrorist label made that impossible. Condoleezza Rice's staff were clear. The Secretary of State 'doesn't talk to terrorists'.

Probably all readers of this book will begin to wonder if we are not following much the same path as that of the United States. Islamophobia is now spreading in Britain. Many Muslims see themselves as a people under threat. Expulsions and imprisonment, or the indefinite house prison of control orders, without knowledge of accuser or accusations, are now normal. Yet this is in the land of *Habeas Corpus*. If Bin Laden is still alive he must be delighted. There is no better way to provide him with more local recruits. Those responsible, at Government level, for our security would do well to read Mark Perry's interesting book.

Bruce Kent

A Dodo?

Philip Atkins and Michael Johnson *A Dodo at Oxford: The Unreliable Account of a Student and his pet Dodo*, Oxgarth Press, 160 pages, hardback ISBN 978 0 9534438 2 6, £12.99

The apparent mystery surrounding the origins and authenticity of this book's contents made it intriguing from the first page. Supposedly an investigation of a diary, written in 1695 by an Oxfordshire man about his pet Dodo then rediscovered in a charity shop in 2008, it is initially quite plausible with its aesthetically realistic photographs of diary pages and early modern typography. The mystery disappears relatively quickly upon reading however, raising the question of the book's purpose. Whilst the diary itself is almost certainly nothing more than an entertaining ruse, the accompanying commentary contains much historical fact and amusing observation. Is this merely a bizarre self-indulgence or perhaps an

intellectual in-joke? One has to wonder quite how small the niche market will be for the punchline. Whatever the intention of the authors the book remains an entertaining, if slightly bemusing, journey through the life of a man and his dodo in early modern Oxfordshire, interspersed with the dissection of random contemporary artefacts ‘discovered’ in the diary. At the end of the book, despite the smiles raised along the way, one question remains – why?

Sarah O'Malley

Afghanistan

Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars – The Inside Story*, Simon & Schuster 2010, 464 pages, ISBN 9780857200440, £20

Even though this book is really only about one war – Afghanistan – it is a very revealing story. More than that, it is also an astonishing one for reasons that the author would not have had in mind. The dysfunctional relationship between the White House and the Pentagon, which this book reveals, is quite scary. These are the same people who make nuclear weapon decisions.

The book is a blow-by-blow, meeting-by-meeting account of the way in which, during 2009, a policy was agreed which resulted in Obama's statement about Afghanistan of November 2009. He announced then, after all these discussions, that there would be a troop increase (not as large as the Pentagon wanted) and, most significantly, the start of a military withdrawal in July 2011.

There are several surprises. Since Afghanistan is meant to be a UN/NATO operation, no one seems to have thought of consulting their so-called partners in the run-up to this decision. Ban Ki-Moon does not even appear in the index. British forces get the briefest mention. Even so, they get more than is given to those of the other countries with troops deployed.

Solutions to problems are overwhelmingly framed in military terms. ‘The man who is equipped only with a hammer sees every problem as a nail’ rings true on every page. Obama, with Vietnam in mind, is clearly desperate to get out of the Afghanistan swamp. He is, however, squeezed at every point by the military. His Vice-President, Joe Biden, has, perhaps, the most original ideas, but he gets marginalized.

There is no evidence that any one realises that the United States is not thought, by the rest of the world, to be God's gift to world order. No one

asks why terrorists take to terrorism or if insurgents have some reason for insuring – if I may invent a word. At one point, even an intelligent man like the President himself says ‘We don’t seek world domination or occupation’. The 1,000 US bases and military facilities strung around the world tell a different story to most of us.

US connivance in the occupation of Palestine or the slaughter in Iraq, as reasons for Muslim hostility, gets no mention. Palestine itself is not even in the index. It is indeed revealing that Pakistan, with its eyes on India, has played such an ambivalent role in the whole conflict.

In a rather *Readers’ Digest* style the author describes in detail all the various lengthy top level meetings that went on before the November announcement. I had to wonder how Obama sleeps at night, and when he has time to think about the other pressing problems on his mind.

Thankfully, the book starts with a helpful list of all the participants, military, diplomatic and White House. The reader is left with no idea where the lines of authority actually run. Loyalty to the President, much trumpeted, is actually in short supply. Time and again the military come back to challenge his views with amendments, alternative suggestions and even media contradictions. This habit is not just a military weakness. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defence, tells a dinner gathering in Washington, at which President Karzai is present, ‘we are not leaving Afghanistan prematurely ... in fact we are not leaving at all’. This was exactly the opposite of the Obama position, which all had agreed to support. General Petraeus, the new commander in Afghanistan, says more privately, ‘this is the kind of fight we’re in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids’ lives’.

This is a very important book which ought to be studied carefully. It is not the details of the discussions that matter or the pecking order of in-fights amongst the military, of which there are plenty. What it reveals is how the most powerful country in the world in military terms actually makes up its mind on critical international issues. The United Nations is a distant sideshow, as are the rest of us. NATO, an arm of US policy, is simply a means of disguising the reality.

The book has, too, a sad taste of tragedy. A decent man, suddenly given great world power, who knows where he wants to go, is impeded, but not yet brought to a halt, by forces, military and political, which are more powerful than he is.

Bruce Kent

HAIKU

Vale, Louis Macneice

who rather drily
asked, ‘Am I supposed to be
dying?’ (his last words)

Beddoes To Beckett

Thought from *Death’s Jest-Book*:
‘What is the lobster’s tune when
he is boiling?’ – Eh?

Resolute

i.m. Ken Coates

One more good man gone!
Haiku he liked – hence, alas,
this briefest tribute.

*Alexis Lykiard’s fine new collection, **Haiku at Seventy**, is published by
Anarchio Press, price £8 (www.alexislykiard.com).*