

Reviews

Palestine

Noam Chomsky & Ilan Pappé, edited by Frank Barat, *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*, Hamish Hamilton, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9780241145067, £14.99

It is not difficult to be attracted to a book about Gaza, what with the horrific escalation of Israeli atrocities and war crimes against the besieged Gaza and all the Occupied Territory. With substantive growth of solidarity movements around the world, and eagerness to probe all facts pertaining to the roots of the Palestinian problem, the need is there. Two prominent and courageous intellectuals, Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, contribute to this book, with their wide knowledge of the subject and their critical analysis of US and Israeli policies, together with editor Frank Barat, who is a 'life-long activist and defender of the Palestinian cause', so that the attraction increases.

It was wise and natural of the editor to have a book about Gaza address the root causes of the Palestinian problem. *Gaza in Crisis* comprises separate articles and two interviews, some published before. Some would argue, correctly, that it is heavy and detailed for the new reader, while little new has been added for the knowledgeable. However, despite a few repetitions and poor production, the book is very well researched, informative and analytical. But it is not easy to review.

Gaza in Crisis contains some paradoxes. Both contributors agree on a basic analysis of the core and roots of the Palestinian problem – the nature of Israel, Zionism, the peace process, Israeli racism, war crimes, the role of the United States, etc – yet they have different discourses on tactics; the effective means of struggle to reach a solution, and the process of achieving it.

Both Chomsky and Pappé have unveiled, challenged and refuted Israeli and American myths and their mainstream media distortions. Both emphasize the fact that the Zionist movement is based on colonialist settlements which entail the Judaization of the land, starting in 1882 and involving ethnic cleansing and subjugation of the Palestinian people. Chomsky sites racist quotes from Dayan, Dershowitz and others, and how the Zionist military assassinated the Jewish poet Jacob de Haan in 1924, who aimed to reach a settlement between the 'Old Yishuv' and the Arab Higher Committee.

Each chapter is important in itself. The two chapters on Gaza are comprehensive, gripping and cover all related aspects. Both writers give intensive documented coverage on the long occupation of Gaza, the blockade, siege and continuous aggression and war crimes, including the massacre on the Flotilla in 2010. This is expressed with genuine passion and anger. They note the later escalation was due to the fact that 'Gaza had to be penalized because people voted the wrong way'.

Pappé's chapter 'Clusters of History – US Involvement in the Question of Palestine' is very informative and explains the United States' limitless support to Israel. He thinks that 'the triangle of the US-Israeli relationship has three equal legs – the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the military-industrial complex and Christian Zionism', while Chomsky believes that the role of AIPAC is secondary, the main factor is for the corporations and the military industrial complex who rule the US.

Both contributors expose the fact that Israeli leaders do not want peace; Israel's leaders 'prefer land to security' and the peace process has reached a dead end. They argue that Israel would launch a war when there is any serious prospect of peace or when there is a ceasefire, under any pretext, as was the case in 1982 with the Israeli war on Lebanon and the Palestinians, and the last war on Gaza. Both contributors express their belief that targeting civilians and infrastructure by the Israeli army is a studied policy to intimidate Palestinians in pursuit of a colonialist policy. To unveil the Israeli distortions, Chomsky highlights the fact that capturing Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah in 2006 was the first cross-border action since 2000, while Israel violated 'the border almost on daily basis with impunity and met only with silence here'.

In general, Pappé's discourse is dynamic and more action oriented. Of particular note are his two very important chapters on 'State of Denial: the Nakbah in Israeli History and Today' and 'Blueprint for One State Movement: a Troubled History'. He argues that a comprehensive solution requires starting with the roots of the problem, 'reselling the past', and the Zionists taking responsibility for dispossession of the Palestinians. Achieving one democratic state demands a long process of struggle at all levels, requiring a wide, strong movement and comprehensive transformation. Chomsky's chapter on 'A Middle East Peace that Could Happen, (But Won't)', reflects his pessimism; on the whole, he sees the main development will come principally from changes in US policies. He stresses the importance of changing public opinion in the United States.

This difference is reflected in the joint interview with them, entitled 'The Ghettoization of Palestine', based on vital questions from the editor.

Each contributor answered the questions separately; any difference was neither contested nor discussed.

Some of Chomsky's answers might be deemed to be disappointing, mostly to new readers who want to find the compass for solidarity activities and the appropriate discourse accompanying it. In addition, this part does not serve the aim of the editor, Frank Barat, that the 'book can be used as a guide'. Chomsky strongly advocates the two state solution because 'it has international consensus', (though he supports a bi-national state, but not as an immediate goal). This is contrary to reality. Doesn't the consensus include mainly the genuine support of the powerful occupier and its imperial ally? Chomsky also expressed his support for the Geneva Accords, which was a surprise to me, as the Accords were received with anger and contempt by the great majority of Palestinians and the Solidarity Movement, as they ignore most of the basic rights of the Palestinians. Chomsky, contrary to Pappé's convictions, believes that the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel won't be effective as 'preparatory educational and organizing work has scarcely been done'. This is strange considering the substantive success in the last two years; Chomsky has been challenged by BDS advocates who argue that it has the potential to educate and mobilize in support of Palestinian National Rights

On the whole, I enjoyed reading the book. For people in the solidarity movement who are anxious to understand the horrific crisis in Gaza and the roots of the Palestinian problem, *Gaza in Crisis* is an interesting book to read!

Jehan Helou

Health

Edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *Morbid Symptoms: Socialist Register 2010 (Health Under Capitalism)*, Merlin Press, 344 pages, paperback ISBN 9780850366921, £15.95, hardback ISBN 9780850366914, £50.00

In the United Kingdom we are necessarily preoccupied with the attack on our own National Health Service. New Labour having paved the way for the Coalition's frontal assault, the prospect of a totally marketised and privatised health system looms ever larger. This book will help us to place that assault in a global context as part of the neo-liberal attempt to

eradicate the last bastion of a universal egalitarianism based on need.

The joint editor, Colin Leys, takes a thoughtful look in the introductory article at the progression of health care under capitalism from a historical perspective. He takes issue with those who see the progress of health care as an offshoot of capitalist growth, and attributes the fall in mortality in the late 19th century more to advances in sanitation, improvements in water and food cleanliness than to the efficacy of medical advance. That is not to say that the health of society does not owe much of its improvement to social pressure, as electoral democracy was extended. Is that what makes the neo-liberal revival so pernicious, seeking as it does to obfuscate the rationality of responding to need alone, force feeding us the elixir of pecuniary advantage as the universal panacea? This matter is also touched upon in the article by Hans-Ulrich Deppe, 'The nature of health care: commodification versus solidarity'. The uniqueness of health care and its continuing association with altruistic state provision makes it necessary for the private medical and pharmaceutical companies to tread relatively softly when implementing their marketisation strategies.

Necessarily, there are many statistics in the book, and one of the most interesting is the fact that amongst the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) high gross domestic product does not uniformly indicate the best health results, although with the non-OECD states it does. In this context the views of Richard G. Wilkinson, who in his landmark book, *The Impact of Inequality*, gives substance to the view that inequality itself leads to ill health, are touched on. Within the non-OECD states what can be correlated is the fact that those states which have undergone the travails of structural adjustment programmes have not improved health care as much as those nations, such as Malaya, which have taken their own path.

Of the 17 articles slightly over half originate from North America, but only two are specifically on North American issues. As one would expect there is an article on Obama's health reform, which at the time of writing was only in draft, the book having been published in 2009. It was therefore not possible to come to grips with the very limited final Bill that was endorsed by the House and Senate. As the article explains, the initial intention was to set up a government-run health insurance scheme, which, by its efficiency and low cost, would engender market competition, forcing the insurance industry to provide a better service. As things ended up, this initiative to bring competition actually brought monopoly, with the governmental insurance scheme dropped, but with a legal injunction that citizens must obtain health insurance. The Bill was vigorously opposed by

the Republicans (and some Democrats) who managed to block other progressive elements of the legislation and are, even now, contesting some measures on the grounds of unconstitutionality and States' rights.

In contrast to the United States, most of Europe has free medical care, usually through social insurance mechanisms but, as in the United Kingdom, there is creeping marketisation and privatisation. Public hospitals are being sold off to private health companies in Sweden, Austria and Germany. It is assumed that by 2020 something like 40 to 50% of hospitals in Germany will be private hospitals. As well as public health insurance citizens frequently have to contribute to private health insurance schemes to obtain the best treatment, paying 'top up' fees and 'out-of-pocket payments', the latter being particularly prevalent in Eastern Europe. In The Netherlands, for example, more than 60% of the population have additional private health insurance. Throughout Europe the increasing costs of medical care are used as a reason for introducing marketisation, yet the necessary mechanisms for marketisation not only curtail the re-distributive elements of health care, but also require an extensive bureaucracy, thus increasing those very costs. Of course, here in the UK we add our own little twist to cost escalation, in the form of private finance initiatives (PFI).

There is a compelling article on the pharmaceutical industry, analysing its marketing strategies, after which one can see why the industry is held in such low esteem in the United States and Europe, with only the tobacco and oil industries less well thought of. The author argues that the industry's preoccupation with growth even impels the distortion of need through the 'medicalisation' of previously 'non-medical phenomena', such as high cholesterol, for example. We can note in this context the fact that children as young as eight in the United States are being considered for prescription of statins, presumably so they can visit MacDonal'd's and Pizza Hut more frequently. There is, of course, a lot more information about the pharmaceutical industry; its excessive profits, cartelisation, aggressive marketing strategies, which subvert local healthcare policies, concentration on the diseases of the affluent to the detriment of the Third World poor. It is all here and more. Also included is an article entitled 'Between obesity and hunger: the capitalist food industry', which covers in some depth this particular industry's role in ill health.

The struggle of health workers in Canada highlights the global difficulties faced by workers in the context of neo-liberal managerial initiatives, which are alarmingly described as 'neo-Taylorism'. Also, interestingly, it touches upon care work, that conducted by paid medical

staff and that supplied by unpaid relatives, where managers attempt to reduce the former at the expense of the latter. In Canada, at present, the author estimates that some 70% of care work is unpaid, placing often onerous duties on relatives and friends. But it is not only in the advanced countries, by any means, that some changes in medical technology, combined with aggressive marketing and privatisation strategies, have had weighty consequences: some of the worst effects have been felt in the developing world, and the text includes articles on China, India and Africa.

In China the efforts to improve health care started on a largely free basis centred on commune or factory with innovations such as the 'barefoot doctor', but, after 1979 and the start of market reforms, it was to 'become one of the most commercialised in the world'. This, according to the text, is now being improved so that, by 2040, the situation will be returned to the position of thirty years ago. The trajectory of India's health care now, of course, follows a neo-liberal path, which has seen improvements for the élite but the continuation of hardship for the majority, with seemingly intractable problems such as child mortality at 2.2 million a year. An article by Mohan Rao entitled 'Health for all and neo-liberal globalisation: an Indian rope trick' says it all.

Healthcare strategy in the developing countries is discussed in terms of the 1978 World Health Organisation-UNICEF Alma Ata declaration on primary health care, 'Health for All', and in the subsequent document from the World Bank in 1987, 'Financing Health Services in Developing Countries: An Agenda for Reform'. The Alma Ata goals were aimed to encourage a wide spread of healthcare activities, regulating and setting standards, and were a rational response to the failures of the 1960s, which concentrated on massive vertical campaigns based on scientific overconfidence. The author mentions campaigns such as that mounted for the eradication of malaria, or family planning in India. However, the potentially revolutionary edicts of Alma Ata were overshadowed by the 'reform' initiatives emanating from the OECD in alliance with the World Bank. Structural Adjustment schemes were enforced on many developing countries, resulting in a diminution of state welfare organisations including health care.

There is a contribution on the Cuban healthcare system and its achievements against all the odds, but, more specifically, the text discusses what it calls Cuba's 'medical diplomacy'. This is the export of Cuban doctors around the world: many to Venezuela and other Latin American countries, with teams also dispatched to natural disasters in Africa, China and Pakistan.

The medical soap is dissected; its progression into a major genre of television drama is charted from Dr. Finlay's Casebook to ER. The author notes that, as yet, the soaps have failed to portray in any detail the changes in medical policy, concentrating instead on the inter-personal. In the final contribution, Julian Tudor Hart calls for more participatory democracy and 'greater understanding of our world' and our place in it, and less 'biochemical tinkering' with our brains in the context of 'mental health in a sick society' – a fitting conclusion to an exhaustive tour of global disjuncture.

This text is a highly informative addition to the Socialist Register series. This review has skimmed the surface of its varied and detailed content. Nevertheless, what stands out is the scope and depth of the neo-liberal attack on public universal medical provision. Obviously, the effort to defend the latter will vary from country to country and, in this context, it would have been useful to have more intelligence on the struggle of health workers themselves. It would have been particularly interesting to hear about the trade union response elsewhere in Europe where they are facing similar problems to the United Kingdom. For us in the UK the battle lines are becoming more and more obvious as we face a crucial struggle to halt the final act in a long running saga of so-called NHS 'reform', which will allow the market, if unchecked, to be truly the arbiter of our fate.

John Daniels

Blitz

Francis Beckett, *Firefighters and the Blitz*, with an introduction by Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, Merlin Press, 2010, 208 pages, ISBN 9780850366730, £13.95

The executive council of the Fire Brigades Union are to be congratulated for commissioning this short, popular, well illustrated, seventieth memorial to more than one thousand firefighters who died and many thousands who were injured during the Blitz. There is considerable revisionism in current historical thinking about the home front during the Second World War, to which this book adds another chapter.

It is a familiar story of amateurism and class privilege being replaced by professionalism and a structure fit for the huge tasks the war presented, with a great deal of heroism in between. It is astonishing how poorly prepared the service was for war, considering how much of the talk before

the war had been about the threat from the air. What's more, it is largely thanks to the Fire Brigades Union that the service evolved into one capable of meeting the challenge.

At the beginning of the war there were 1,600 independent fire brigades, each a separate fiefdom run on military lines. Beckett says that the Home Office had been thinking about the threat since Hitler came to power in 1933, but it took until 1937 for them to fund fire precautions and improvements in the nation's fire fighting services.

Despite the experience from Spain, it was not until 1938 that a civilian fire service was formed - the Auxiliary Fire Service. The Fire Brigades Act, of 1938, made fire protection compulsory for every local authority in Britain, with the country divided into 11 regions to co-ordinate resources, but there was no extra cash or any reduction in the number of brigades. The biggest, the London Fire Brigade, had only 106 pumping appliances, whilst some of the smallest, controlled by Parish Councils, had only a few part timers and an ancient pump.

In the early part of the war firefighters tackled some terrifying blazes with large amounts of improvised kit and considerable bravery and stoicism. It was the very toughest of learning environments. Yet it took two years before the government realised the service needed to be unified, and it was nationalised in August 1941.

A classic example of the type of bureaucratic bungling was when the London Fire Brigade left its area to tackle a blaze following an air raid on the fuel depots at Thamesdown. On arrival they were told only the local commander could make the request for assistance.

'In the absence of a local officer, the order had to go through the regional commissioner for Essex and East Anglia, who was, it turned out, the Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Efforts were made to contact this eminent gentleman; the Master [however] had retired for the night and his staff were reluctant to wake him.'

Some improvised equipment was highly successful, such as the two wheeled trailer pumps, which ended up being pulled around by more than two thousand London taxi driver volunteers. This is reminiscent of the mythology of the little boats which saved the day at Dunkirk – heroic, certainly, but no substitute for a properly equipped and trained service.

If there is a real hero of this story, it is John Horner, FBU General Secretary from 1934 until 1964. He battled with, amongst others, Herbert Morrison, to modernise and professionalise the service. According to current FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, he 'was the most significant

person in the Union's history'. It was Horner who realised how important it was to recruit the members of the auxiliary fire service into the FBU, thereby strengthening the union's hand in the formation of a national fire service. Sadly, the national service was not retained after the war. It never fails to amaze how politicians of all stripes have the capacity to praise to the skies the work of the emergency services when they are needed and then treat them so badly once the emergency has passed.

The country was woefully unprepared for the war. If Hitler had decided to finish us off, he almost certainly could have done. He didn't, and we got our second chance, but not before many people paid with their lives.

I remember going to see my grandfather was glued to the local television news. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the devastating attack on Coventry. That night we found out for the first time that he had been working on building hangers for the shadow factory (part of a plan to increase aircraft production) at Ryton near Coventry. The morning after the attack, he and his fellow workers were asked to go into town to help clear up the mess and damp down the fires.

Fifty years later, he was still traumatised by what he had seen that day. During the night, 554 people had been killed, including 26 firefighters. That was the first time he had told anyone of his experiences, including my grandmother, he was full of praise for the fire crews who had battled all night having come from as far away as London and Peterborough.

There are many lessons to be learned from the experience of the fire service in the Second World War and, whilst this book is a splendid introduction, I believe the subject is worthy of a much more substantial study.

Nick Matthews

What Chance Revolution?

John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth*, 544 pages, Monthly Review Press, 2010, hardback ISBN 9781583672198, £55, paperback ISBN 9781583672181, £14.95

This inordinately long book, 540 pages with 90 pages of reference notes, by three American University Professors of Sociology is an expansion of Bellamy Foster's 2009 book *The Ecological Revolution*. It is really a

collection of articles by the authors for the New York Marxist journal, *Monthly Review*, of which Bellamy Foster is himself the current editor. Its chief merit is that it contains in Part One probably the most complete, up-to-date collection of facts about the imminent threat from human action to the survival of the human species and most other existing species on planet earth. The arguments in Parts Two and Three of the book, which support its sub-title – *Capitalism's War on the Earth* – are taken from two of Marx's insights in Volume One of *Capital*, and developed in Volume Three. One is Marx's concept of 'the treadmill' of capitalist production, that cannot cease until it has absorbed all the resources available. The other is Marx's concept of socio-ecological metabolism. It is strange that this concept in Marx of metabolism between human beings and nature has been so little discussed, because it occurs clearly in the second paragraph of Chapter 7 of *Capital* Volume One, thus:.

'Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature.'

The 'treadmill' is originally the tread mill of slave labour, but it is used by Marx to describe the endless application of capital to make more profit to invest in ever more production to generate more profit to convert into still more capital and so on, using up ever more resources. The 'metabolism' between human labour and nature is an exchange, which develops human social production, but which results in changes both in human labour and in nature, involving chemical reactions in both human beings and nature. This is the dialectic in Marx's materialism. Dialectic is used by Marx not just as a disagreement in argument, as it was in the dialogues of Ancient Greece. For him it is a contradiction in social relations which leads to change. Similarly in Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, nature is not seen as inert matter but as subject to change, particularly as the result of human activity. Thus, dialectical materialism in Marx's and Engels' thought is the mutual response of the metabolism of social and natural activity.

Marx gives the example of robbing the soil of essential nutrients and the delivery of its products to the cities, resulting in the denuding of the countryside and the pollution of the cities. But he makes it clear that this process leads to the destruction of the whole fabric of inter-relations which make up the ecological system. This is what Marx called the 'metabolic rift' in the relations of humanity and labour, and he could see how it led not only to the degradation of the soil, but also to exploitation of labour, for example, in harvesting the guano to replace lost soil nutrients. The

overall result of this rift is the current threat to the actual survival of the planet. But the point that Foster and company draw from Marx's analysis is that it is capitalism's endless drive for profit to accumulate more and more capital that is creating the threat to the planet, because of the voracious drive of capital for more resources.

An essential element in Marx's analysis of the workings of capitalism, which Bellamy Foster and co. emphasise, is the association of the metabolic rift with growing inequality in human societies. It is not only the actual slave conditions of those like the guano miners, but also the wage slavery of the whole labour force, most especially in the European colonies, which is caught up in the drive for capital accumulation. In this book the authors develop at length, and with much repetition, the workings of this rift in the growth of ecological imperialism, which they recognise has been much less commented on than cultural, political and economic imperialism. Their argument is strangely mixed up with a long discussion of the ecological 'holism' of General Smuts, who made this the basis for his advocacy of the apartheid system in South Africa, a discussion which is something of a deviation from their main theme. This is an important theme, which gives a world-wide perspective to the understanding of the environmental crisis and, in particular, of the very exciting and hopeful response to it, which the authors report to be found among leaders of several Latin American countries.

The emphasis throughout on the lessons to be learnt from Marx's analysis of capital accumulation are certainly interesting, but the insights of a philosopher who died more than 100 years ago, and whose followers have been singularly unsuccessful in applying his principles, hardly provide a firm basis for the conclusions in this book about what should be done to save the planet. The criticisms of the many variants of a more regulated and modified capitalist system of production and accumulation are very telling, but the conclusion that a world uprising is required seems wholly unrealistic as Marx describes it in Volume 3 (page 959):

'in which the associated producers govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control ... with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.'

Short of revolution, what kinds of steps could be taken is best found in the Latin American countries and the youth movements throughout the developed countries. We can only hope that they may find their way to some solutions in time to avert disaster. A reading of the first part of this

book would certainly frighten them into action, but they will have to find their own way forward, appropriate to their time and place.

Michael Barratt Brown

Israel's narrative

Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Verso, 2010, 344 pages, paperback ISBN 978184467623, £9.99, 332 pages, hardback ISBN 9781844674220, £18.99

Given its denial of much of the accuracy of the 'official' narrative of Israel's ancient past, it is small wonder that opprobrium has been heaped on the author of this book by his fellow Israeli academics. In spite of this, or perhaps partly because of it, the book was in the bestseller list for 18 weeks in Israel and went through three editions. Why so much fuss about a book on ancient history? The simple explanation is that *The Invention of the Jewish People* demolishes the historical justification of the Zionist project: if ever there was an 'imagined community', in the sense of contrived, then Israel fits the bill.

Ideologically, there has to be some justification for taking another people's land and dispatching a large proportion of the original inhabitants into the squalor and deprivation of refugee camps in bordering countries. This is quite apart from the several wars of expansion perpetrated by the Israeli state (with at least one bringing the world close to the biblical prediction of Armageddon), followed by occupation, to fulfil another biblical dream, namely that of Eretz Israel. That justification, of course, is the historical link going back two thousand years, the proof of which is to be found in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the fact that the Jewish race has survived as a homogenous entity linked by heredity. What the author does to this historical narrative over 300 highly erudite pages is to question the biblical story, in particular the whole question of the second exile, providing a much more believable history. He does this largely by meticulously examining the works of various historians of the Jewish people, from Josephus to contemporary scholars. Simultaneously, the text is also a study in nationalism, charting the ideological growth of Zionism.

The first chapter consists of a discursive examination concerning what social and historical forces are required to engender the nation state — what makes a people a nation and the differing social forces which bring this about. This has particular resonance for both Israeli and Palestinian

nationalism, with the primacy of Israeli nationalism over that of the Palestinians. In this context the author admits Israel is a 'rather strange society' where its nationalism, although claiming to be democratic and should therefore be seeking to represent all its citizens within its recognized borders, actually defines citizenship by religion and race, thus relegating Palestinian Arabs to second-class citizens.

Israel is perhaps unique in the importance it attaches to ancient archaeology and history, but probably unsurprising in the context of every nation's desire for an ideological continuity, 'our glorious past', and so on. Ethnocentric myths and ritualised events celebrating the national entity are perhaps more important for Israel given its relative youthfulness and the diversity of its immigrant citizens. In this context the author tackles the vexed question of race in connection with some twentieth century Zionist ideologues' use of crude Darwinism to maintain that Jews have a distinct bloodline stretching back to biblical times. In fact, Sand has been taken to task by the eminent geneticist, Harry Ostrer, of the New York University School of Medicine, who claims to disprove Sand's assertions regarding the importance to Jewish history of the Khazar people of the northern Caucasus, the Ukraine and southern Russia. Sand is, however, adamant that no bloodline going back 2000 years to biblical times, indicating a Jewish DNA pattern, has yet been found, and he regards such a quest as distasteful, given the Nazi preoccupation with eugenics and 'blood contamination' by Jews.

Many leading Israeli politicians and military leaders were passionate about ancient Jewish history, and some were even keen amateur archaeologists. So keen was Ben Gurion that he held fortnightly meetings at his house, which the most eminent Israeli historians would attend, along with military and political leaders. For Sand 'it was a junction of intellectual and political exchange', and it is a fact that the Israeli leadership saw themselves in the light of Jewish history as David against Goliath, and as 'recapitulating the biblical conquest of Canaan'.

The author's response to this historical hyperbole is to pour cold water on the idea of a direct line from the ancient Israelites of biblical times to the present settler population of Israel. Instead, he suggests that the present Arab inhabitants of Israel and the West Bank would be better candidates for having ties to ancient Israel, although they may have accommodated themselves quickly to the teachings of Islam, another Abrahamic religion, when invaded by the followers of Muhammad.

Sand affirms that the glue that held together the Jewish people was the religion of Judaism, and he notes that ancient Judaism, unlike its present

incarnation, was a proselytising religion, so much so that it gained adherents in many other locales. Part of the historical essence of Jewishness is the supposed expulsion, *en masse*, after the destruction of the second Temple of Jerusalem and the Bar Kokhba revolt. The author maintains that no such event on the scale of a whole people took place. Already, prior to this, there were Jewish communities from North Africa to Armenia and from Persia to Rome. For Sand the great numbers of Jews in Eastern Europe is linked with the rise of the Khazar kingdom that accepted Judaism as the dominant form of worship. The Khazars were a Turkic people, semi-nomadic, who, at the time of their greatest expansion, dominated southern Russia. In North Africa Judaism was again spread by proselytising Jews, and in particular Berber tribes accepted this monotheistic religion, presumably providing a bridge to Moorish Spain. Here we have the seeds of the formation of the two dominant ethnic forms of Jewishness: the Sephardic and the Ashkenazy. Sand maintains that, after 2000 years of interaction with host communities, the defining characteristic of Jewishness was not race based but religious in form. The use of the Hebrew language fell into abeyance and its use became largely ceremonial: they no longer spoke Hebrew but Yiddish in Germany and large swathes of Eastern Europe up until the start of World War Two.

The Invention of the Jewish People is, in parts, pretty hard going. This is particularly so if the reader is not conversant with the detail of Jewish ancient history, and it is a long time since he or she read any of the Old Testament. But the book more than repays the effort. Let us hope it can bring a better understanding of Jewish history, and help dispel a political present marred with so much bigotry and hate. As Sand puts it himself, 'If the nation's history was mainly a dream, why not begin to dream its future afresh, before it becomes a nightmare?' Sadly, many would say, for the Palestinians that nightmare has already arrived.

John Daniels

A Fair Society?

Will Hutton, *Them and Us: Changing Britain – Why We Need A Fair Society*, 448 pages, Little Brown, 2010, hardback ISBN 9781408701515, £20

Will Hutton was a *Guardian* writer, then Editor of *The Observer*, and is now Executive Vice-chair of The Work Foundation, and led the Coalition

Government's Fair Pay Review. Using 'Them and Us' in the title of the book, he defines 'Them' as 'the financial, media and bureaucratic élites' and 'Us' as the rest of the people. The central argument of this long book is that capitalism has to be made 'fair' in order to work, and it is the job of government to make it 'fair'. Governments, and particularly the British and US Governments, have in the last three decades been failing to do their job. Capitalism with a free and unregulated market has generated a widening gap between the rich and the poor, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. This is not only immoral; it is inefficient. The economy fails to grow and innovation is thwarted.

Hutton presents much evidence to support his thesis, especially in the enormous enriching of the financial sector and its catastrophic collapse, carrying with it most of the developed capitalist economies. Much of what Hutton describes in analysing the financial and economic crisis is well known, but his exposure of the mathematical model, which the bankers relied on to avoid risk, is interesting and important. In the model they employed it was assumed that all participants in financial markets acted independently, so that a high risk action taken by one would not necessarily be followed by others. In fact, it has been found that the banking fraternity is a network of closely knit members. One move is closely followed by others. Hence the domino effect of risky moves, which led to the 2007-2009 disaster. It was not just one bank that was too big to fail but a whole banking sector. It is to be hoped, but it is far from sure, that they have learned their lesson.

Hutton is no fundamental critic of capitalism. His argument, in his own words, is that 'capitalism needs to be much more subtle than simple reliance on markets, requiring a mix of so-called "soft" intermediate institutions and a capacity to ensure fairness, while permitting openness and challenge.' Competition and risk taking, Hutton sees as essential for development, but the tragedy of an over-developed financial sector is that it has killed off all other enterprise. The great production corporations have made financial operations almost their major activity. Profits have been put into money-making speculation, and not into innovation, and especially not into manufacturing. Both in the UK and in the USA, markets have relied on cheap imports from China for their consumer booms. In an unequal society this meant mass production for the masses, leaving in the UK and USA a niche market for the rich. English businesses have been bought up by foreign companies, hedge-funds in the lead. The concentration of company finance on increasing shareholder value meant that investment was given secondary importance to share prices.

Hutton makes an impassioned and impressive plea for the high skills available in the UK to be given the opportunity and the public support to develop the new industrial revolution that is emerging in the knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy. To this end, Hutton stresses the absolute necessity for education to be given the highest government priority, even in a period of widespread fiscal retrenchment. He speaks several times of life-long learning, but surprisingly does not connect this with adult education for those who missed out on much learning at school, leaving at least a quarter of the workforce largely illiterate, and an even larger proportion innumerate. Hutton quotes several authorities arguing for the development by government intervention of the special skills needed to meet the rapid technological advances being made in, for example, genetics, life sciences, robots, miniaturisation, and virtual reality. Such social spending has been declining for decades, especially as a direct result of the disastrous distinction in attitudes towards what are called the 'undeserving poor' in relation to the 'deserving rich'. And this is in real danger of worsening from the current public spending cuts.

Hutton's critique is not limited to exposure of the inadequacies of both business and government. The media are revealed as major players in the downgrading of both British and US manufacturing. He quotes a revealing comment by the director of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) when a local government council appealed against a *Daily Mail* article on its treatment of a child care case. The director wrote, 'I realise that the council feels that the newspapers have reported this case unfairly. But it is not for the PCC to make judgements about fairness.' So, Hutton concludes that 'nothing could better sum up Britain's contemporary media culture: unfairly spin "facts" to "stir things up" and further entrench readers' prejudices, and then to offer no redress.' The PCC is a self-regulating body, and one report, quoted by Hutton, reveals that 'of 278,227 complaints made over ten years up to 2007, less than 10% were investigated, and only 197 were upheld'. Other matters of media irresponsibility are more serious. The media coverage in the build up to the war with Iraq is regarded by Hutton as 'a classic case in point'. 'Any accusations that the evidence was being exaggerated or deliberately misinterpreted were ruthlessly squashed, as in the Andrew Gilligan case.' 'Once the day's or week's news agenda has been created,' he writes, 'the broadcasters tend to follow ... follow the crowd is the message ... Even the BBC is giving ground.'

While he sees that 'the media has risen in importance', Hutton argues that 'sheer political exigency has turned the make-shift Cabinet Office of

Number 10 into a new centre of *de facto* monarchical power. Meanwhile the Cabinet and Parliament have shrunk in importance.’ And he goes on: ‘The select committee system, despite efforts to beef it up, is a shadow of the inquiring committees in the American Congress.’ In considering ‘What To Do?’ Hutton proposes that:

‘Britain needs to do two things to change its destructive dynamic. First it must build up countervailing power to the quasi-monarchical centre ... Second, media power must be sufficiently balanced so that media generated maelstroms based on slanted and false reporting are less likely.’

Hutton does not see the trade unions as a valuable element in this balance. He regards them as too powerful in the past, turning successful economic growth into wage and price inflation. His hope for the future seems to rest in Government action to relate earnings to some just reward such as that which was proposed in the Coalition Government’s Fair Pay Review, which he was, rather surprisingly – a one-time Socialist – invited to lead.

A Fair Society in all its several parts is what this book advocates. Fairness is all the rage these days. Chancellor Osborne introduced the word ‘fair’ in his aims no less than 25 times in his October Financial Statement, while introducing arguably the most unfair budget presented in the United Kingdom for seventy years. While Hutton evidently believes that the British public will rally behind his call for fairness as the basis of government and business, the omens from the Coalition Government’s financial proposals do not seem favourable. And Hutton, surprisingly, never refers to the one issue where a large section of the population has shown its support for fairness – that is in Fair Trade for the producers of raw commodities, coffee and cocoa beans, tea, sugar, nuts, tropical fruits, cotton, rubber, mainly produced in developing countries, which used to be our colonies and have suffered exploitation. Even the giant corporations, like Nestlé and Kraft, are advertising that their products carry the Fair Trade logo, and the supermarkets and many coffee houses, such as Costa and Starbucks, offer a range of Fair Trade products. The better price and premium guaranteed by the logo do not quite come up to the gold standard of the original Fair Trade companies such as Café Direct, but the interesting point is that the average consumer’s preferences have persuaded Big Business to adopt a measure of fairness. Spreading the message nearer home and during a period of spending cuts may be more difficult. But Hutton is absolutely right to insist that fairness in the capitalist market is not only morally desirable but economically more efficient.

Michael Barratt Brown

Rebellion of Kings

Edward Vallance, *A Radical History of Britain: Visionaries, Rebels and Revolutionaries – The Men and Women who Fought for our Freedoms*, Little Brown Publishers, 656 pages, hardback ISBN 9781408700501, £25.00

This is an excellent book: interesting and informative, well written and easy to read. However, I think Edward Vallance overstates his case, and contradicts himself. He opens on an optimistic note:

‘Often, historians write the history of radical movements as a string of glorious failures, an account of the struggle of men and women who were ahead of their time, perpetually thwarted by the status quo and ever condemned to have their political dreams reach fruition only after their deaths. The truth is that in many instances radical movements were able to affect real changes on the government of the nation.’

And finishes on an equally optimistic one:

‘Our freedom lies in our power. Pessimists may point to demonstrations against the war in Iraq as evidence of a modern government’s capacity to ignore the will of the people. However, the millions who marched against that illegal war also remind us of the readiness of the British people once again, in the words of Shelley, to rise, “like lions after slumber”.’

But in between there are more than 500 pages of depressing reading about ‘glorious failures’. There were plenty of rebellions, revolutions, civil wars, huge mass marches and demonstrations, but none of them really made any difference.

So what’s the good news? In a thousand years of British radicalism, there is none. It always failed. The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, The Pilgrimage of Grace and many other uprisings all ended in failure and mass executions. Moving on, the Chartists drew thousands upon thousands to their demonstrations and meetings and achieved nothing except putting the wind up the establishment.

So let us consider the ‘successes’ of radical British history: the most interesting political and social experiment was between 1649 and 1660, during the period of the English Republic. But the Civil Wars which gave rise to the Republic were the bloodiest:

‘What has often been romanticised as a chivalrous ‘war without an enemy’ was, in fact, the bloodiest civil conflict that the British Isles has ever known. As a

proportion of the adult population, more men died during England's civil wars than during the First World War.'

This staggered me. And what did such bloodshed produce? Oliver Cromwell became king in all but name, even invoking the hereditary principle that his son, Richard, should succeed him on his death. Oliver was no radical; he was a conservative country squire, as was his son-in-law, Ireton. They suppressed the truly radical elements: the Ranters, Levellers, Quakers and Diggers.

And how did it all end? Cromwell's son and heir, Richard, was deposed, and the monarchy restored. Then came the Glorious Revolution, which wasn't so glorious, and within a century there were 200 capital offences on the statute book. As Vallance points out, many of the condemned were pardoned, but many were not. Tyburn became a Roman circus where thousands turned up to see people hanged: men, women and children. This is the low point British radicalism had reached.

Moving on again, the Victorians are often derided for their obsession that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness'. The devastating cholera epidemics that killed the poor had begun reaching into the middle and upper classes. Something had to be done! And it was; clean drinking water and a good sewage system began to be provided. There was a similar situation with health. Men were so malnourished and unfit that they could hardly hold a rifle. They had to be fattened up to provide suitable cannon fodder. And there was a similar problem with education. The Industrial Revolution demanded an army of pen pushers. Illiteracy no longer served the elite; people had to learn to 'reed 'n' rite'. Nothing radical here.

And so it comes down to the present day: the welfare state, the Beveridge Report, the Butler Education Act of 1944, the NHS. All the radical demands so watered down as to be almost unrecognisable. In education: lots of public schools doing just fine, lots of private schools doing just fine, some state schools doing just fine, a lot of state schools doing just awful, and teachers seeking early retirement because of nervous breakdowns.

And health? Private hospitals and clinics are doing a roaring trade. For many middle class people, insurance for private health care is almost mandatory. When Aneurin Bevan went about setting up the NHS, he was opposed all the way by the medical profession. Bevan said that to win them over he had 'to stuff their mouths with gold'. And so it continues to this day.

And the vote? Edward Vallance spends a lot of time on male suffrage and the Suffragettes. A bit like the statistics for the Civil Wars, there are numbers that take one's breath away:

'The exercise of voting rights diminished over the course of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth. Even with the passage of the 1832 Reform Act, alterations in the franchise and, most of all, population growth meant that fewer men as a proportion of the population now exercised the vote than did in the age of Queen Anne (5.2 as opposed to 4.7 per cent), and women for the first time had been formally disenfranchised.'

In the end, both men and women did get the vote. But what does that mean? They got the vote, that's all. Like the Chartists and the Suffragettes with their huge demonstrations, two million people demonstrated in London and elsewhere against the coming war on Iraq and what happened? We got a war on Iraq. And all those ban-the-bomb marches, what did they get us? A new Trident system.

It is the British élites who have won. They have learned when to give way without giving away much at all. It is a kind of British genius. It's the radicals who have lost out: be reasonable and civilised and the élites will give them a pat on the head and thank them for being so understanding. And if the 'radicals' get annoyed and resort to tougher measures, they are condemned for their violence.

This book describes the radical history of Britain, but also understands that there is a history of passivity:

'For it has oftener happened that men have been too passive than too unruly, and the rebellion of Kings against their people has been more common and done more mischief than the rebellion of people against their Kings.'

Where is British radicalism today? Is it total despair: better to get drunk? Is it war-weariness: two world wars in the last century? British radicalism has to recover, conquer a national lethargy, and find itself and fight on. It's a good book. Buy it and read it.

Nigel Potter, Honduras

Fair Trade

John Bowes (ed), *The Fair Trade Revolution*, Pluto Press, 2011, 240 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745330792, £40, paperback ISBN 9780745330785, £12.99

John Bowes, who was a leading manager in the Co-operative Group, responsible for introducing Fair Trade products into Co-op shops, is now the chair of TWIN, the producer-owned membership organisation, which established Fair Trade coffee, chocolate, nuts, tropical fruit and other

commodities in the UK market. It is a pity, therefore, that there is no mention of TWIN (Third World Information Network), as the founder of the Fair Trade Movement in Britain. I have a slight vested interest in this, because I was the first chair of TWIN.

The great strength of these essays collected together by John Bowes lies in the testimony of Third World producers from Nicaragua, Ecuador and Kerala and in Rachel Archer's blog, relating the direct words of producers in Peru, Dominican Republic and Uganda. Harriet Lamb's two contributions describe what the Fair Trade Foundation has done to widen the appeal of Fair Trade in the supermarkets without, hopefully, compromising the basic principles of its founders. Joe Human and Bruce Crowther celebrate the founding of the first UK Fair Trade town at Garstang in Cumbria, which has encouraged a whole galaxy of Fair Trade villages, cities, regions and even countries in the case of Wales. David Croft and Alex Cole claim for Cadbury's the title of first giant multinational company, now a part of the US Kraft Corporation, to embrace Fair Trade. Jonathan Rosenthal details the 'greatest challenge', as he calls it, to win support for Fair Trade among the giant corporations of the United States.

At the end of the book, Robin Murray, chair of TWIN before John Bowes, raises important questions of the future of Fair Trade in growing beyond a subordinate trading role to encouraging a truly collaborative partnership between producers and consumers, which, he argues, could be most effectively advanced by creating a Fair Trade College to encourage the exchange of experience in the mutual trust of fair trading. John Bowes rounds off these essays with an appeal for recognising how much has already been accomplished by the Fair Trade movement and how much more can be done in the future by combining the Fair Trade revolution with a green revolution for sustainability. He cites the lessons to be learnt from the beginnings of a strong movement for Fair Trade and Sustainability among developing countries themselves in Latin America.

Michael Barratt Brown

More information about TWIN is available online (www.twin.org.uk).

Crash

John Lanchester, *Whoops! Why everyone owes everyone and no one can pay*, Penguin, 2010, 256 pages, paperback ISBN 9780141045719, £9.99

This is an outstandingly good introduction to our current economic plight.

Writer John Lanchester explains the crisis in simple and humorous terms.

The banks' larger profits and bonuses came not because they were doing anything better, but just because they were making bigger bets. Between 1986 and 2006, the average return per year on banking shares rose from 2 per cent to 16 per cent. Andrew Haldane, of the Bank of England, explained, 'since 2000, rising leverage fully accounts for movements in UK banks' ROE [return on equity] – both the rise to around 24% in 2007 and the subsequent fall into negative territory in 2008.'

Lanchester points out, 'if we had joined the euro and our mortgages were tied to those groovily low euro interest rates, money would have been even cheaper, and credit even more easily available, so the housing bubble would have been even bigger, and the crash correspondingly crashier. (Two examples of countries where that happened: Ireland and Spain.)'

Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan admitted, 'the consequent surge in global demand for US sub-prime securities by banks, hedge, and pension funds supported by unrealistically positive rating designations by credit agencies was, in my judgment, the core of the problem.'

Lanchester observes, 'the credit crunch was based on a climate (the post-Cold War victory party of free-market capitalism), a problem (the sub-prime mortgages), a mistake (the mathematical models of risk) and a failure, that of the regulators.'

As he notes, 'the process of lending is no longer driven by the legitimate desire of poor-but-reliable people to own a house, but is instead a manufactured process driven by capital which is set loose looking for people to sign up loans. An epidemic began of what has come to be known as "predatory lending": mortgage lenders doing everything they could to sign up borrowers at higher-than-ordinary, sub-prime interest rates, so that the debt they created could then be pooled and securitized and sold on as tranches of various grades of CDO [collateralized debt obligations].' The USA has 250,000 mortgage brokers, mostly unlicensed and unregulated.

So, 'we arrived in the bizarre position in which poor people struggling to pay back their mortgages had miraculously produced the world's most secure financial instruments. This was a fortunate conclusion to reach for both the banks which made money issuing the CDOs and the rating agencies which made money assessing them.'

Goldman Sachs 'went from having to end its status as an investment bank and take federal support, in September 2008, to declaring all-time record profits – with bonuses to match – in July 2009. The bank which would have gone under without government help, and had to borrow \$10

billion from the taxpayer, was less than a year later setting aside \$16.8 billion in pay, bonuses and benefits for itself.’

In sum, it was ‘a huge unregulated boom in which almost all the upside went directly into private hands, followed by a gigantic bust in which the losses were socialized.’

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development rates British banks the 44th safest in the world, six places behind Botswana. Canada’s banks are the world’s safest, because they are regulated, and this has been good for growth – Canada’s incomes have risen by 11 per cent a year since 2004.

Lanchester proposes, ‘the change should be that, if a bank (broadly defined) receives any taxpayers’ money, the existing shareholders are (broadly speaking) wiped out.’ But, as he points out, no laws have been passed to prevent another crash.

Will Podmore

Migration

***Migrants and their descendants – Guide to policies for the well-being of all pluralist societies*, Council of Europe Publishing, 294 pages, ISBN 9789287168535, 54 pages, available from www.book.coe.int**

On 11th January 2011, the High Court of Justice in London ruled three children were detained unlawfully at Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre and, as a consequence, their ‘right to liberty and security’ and ‘right to respect for family and private life’ (Article 5 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights) had been infringed. Prior to this ruling, in December 2010, Nick Clegg announced ‘that the family unit of Yarl’s Wood will be closed to families with children with immediate effect’ and a new system for processing asylum seeking families will be in place by March 2011. These are important victories for all those campaigning against the detention of children for immigration purposes, but what will be the guiding principles of the Coalition’s ‘new system’? How will the system fit with an increasingly restrictive policy on migration overall?

The aim of this guide, produced by the Council of Europe’s Social Cohesion Research and Development Division, is to clarify the issues surrounding the debate on immigration, and ‘their effects on the people concerned’, and to explore the ‘alternative visions and approaches to enable public decision makers to frame innovative policies in line with the

Council of Europe's social cohesion objective, namely the well-being of all in a plural society'. It is the result of numerous academics and migrant organisations – all with expertise and experience of the issues surrounding migrants – coming together to produce a comprehensive guide that seeks to stimulate debate and help answer the question of how to create a fairer system. Although it addresses many complex matters, the *Guide* is easy to read and beautifully presented.

People will 'continue to live side by side', as Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, says in his Foreword. It is, as he says, 'essential to find ways in which this cohabitation can be of benefit to all'.

Abi Rhodes

Not Using the Bomb

T.V.Paul, *The Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons*, Stanford University Press, 336 pages, paperback ISBN 9780804761321, £26.95

This book will be of great historical interest to anyone who needs a handy reminder about the various nuclear weapon crises which have threatened the world since 1945. It is primarily written for the academic defence world, so will not be at all points entirely intelligible to those outside that world. What is '*an eclectic framework which gives importance to rational and normative considerations*' etc, etc? Nevertheless, there are an excellent series of page notes, an extensive index and a lengthy bibliography.

The book is exactly about what its title says. The author suggests that an international norm has developed since 1945 about the non-use of nuclear weapons, even in extreme circumstances. He does not, of course, deny that by their very deployment they are anything other than an ongoing threat. That is what they are for. Nevertheless, despite crisis after crisis, they have not been exploded during hostilities, despite their massive cost, since the fateful days of August 1945.

Why, since then, have all the nuclear weapon States refrained from using nuclear weapons? This question needs an answer. The most militarised country in the world, the United States of America, submitted itself to the most humiliating defeat possible in Vietnam with its last minute rush from Saigon. Not quite as humiliating, perhaps, but the Soviets can hardly have been proud of their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Why did the United States allow their allies, the French, to be defeated by their one time colonial subjects in Vietnam? Was Mrs Thatcher really ready to use nuclear weapons in the case of a looming conventional defeat in the Falklands?

Tracking the history of all this cannot have been easy. What exactly American Presidents said they would do, and what they did do, were often different things. What was said for sabre-rattling purposes and what was an actual intention? Perhaps the world has been fortunate in the leaders it has had. There were certainly those in the Oval Office during the Cuba crisis who, had they been in charge, would have uncorked the nuclear bottle.

If non-use is now a norm, that is not the greatest comfort. We have experienced too many nuclear weapon accidents in the last decades for comfort. I still think we owe our survival to the brave common sense of a Soviet Officer, Colonel Petrov, who, in 1983, refused to report what he thought he had seen – an incoming flight of nuclear-armed missiles from the West.

Why has a non-use norm developed, if indeed it has? The answers are complex but they have plenty to do with reputation, personal liability and law. It took until 1996 before the International Court of Justice gave its somewhat elastic ruling on the illegality of the use of nuclear weapons. If using nuclear weapons involved committing wars crimes, then someone in a leadership role might have realised that international disgrace and even criminal charges might be the consequence. Certainly, the longer the time elapsed since August 1945, and the nuclear bombing of Japan, the more difficult it would have been to use such barbaric weapons once more.

Yet, despite growing commitment to non-use, the Western side of the Cold War built a whole nuclear strategy on the possibility of winning wars actually fought with nuclear weapons. ‘First use’ was a deeply entrenched strategy, underpinned with weapons labelled ‘tactical’ that were designed for first use.

In 1984, General Chalupa, Commander in Chief in Europe, said ‘Nato’s strategy of first use is founded on the principles of flexible response – threatening an aggressor with direct defence and deliberate escalation to include the first use of nuclear weapons’.

I hope T.V. Paul is right and that we have permanently moved to a world of nuclear non-use. I do not, however, hold my breath. The major nuclear powers continue to frustrate progress towards a nuclear-weapon-abolition Convention. The consequence will be that nuclear weapons will, sooner or later, fall into the hands of state or non-state actors who may not be

panicked by threats of mass destruction or fear of suicide. Accidents will continue to happen. Abolition is the only genuine security available.

Bruce Kent

Rome Reviewed

Neville Morley, *The Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism*, Pluto Press, 208 pages, paperback ISBN 9780745328690, £17.99

Morley aims ‘to create a dialogue between Roman and modern imperialism,’ evaluating the interplay between ancient and modern reciprocal images and interpretations, the historian’s ultimate task being ‘to break Rome’s power over the modern imagination.’

This finale betrays a Eurocentric fixation. As Gibbon asked, ‘have Asia and Africa, from Japan to Morocco, any feeling or memory of the Roman Empire?’ For a professedly *marxisant* study, Marx himself plays an oddly muted role, terse references to the Communist Manifesto and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* apart. Marx was absorbed by Roman history from schoolboy days to *Kapital*. For instance, Morley’s praise of Mommsen (pp.117-8) needs tempering by Marx’s (*Kapital*, vol.1) ‘he commits one blunder after another’.

Nor were eighteenth-century approaches as monolithically admiring as Morley implies. No less than Samuel Johnson (Boswell, *Life*, vol.1 pp.311-2) snapped, ‘Rome grew great only by the misery of the rest of mankind’.

Morley naturally emphasises the dark side of ancient imperialism. Some Roman ones would agree – Cicero and Tacitus spring to mind. But Morley does not grasp the nettle of post-imperialism. Africa shows how badly twentieth-century de-colonialisation can go wrong. Apropos of Caesar’s Gallic conquests (pp.30-1), H. H. Scullard (*From the Gracchi to Nero*) pointedly asked, ‘The Gauls fought for freedom, but freedom for what?’ In his ‘Timeline’ of key events, Morley includes the Vandals’ detachment of Carthage from Rome. Yet this simply replaced one external power with another, ushering in a century of brutal religious oppression – not for nothing did ‘Vandal’ acquire (partly thanks to Voltaire) its modern sense, and is pertinent to modern definitions of terrorists as the new barbarians.

Life under the Pax Romana (‘Peace, not War’ being notably the imperial slogan) was ameliorated by both public (the welfare schemes of emperors Nerva and Trajan) and private (such ancient Rockefellers as the multi-

millionaire Herodes Atticus) philanthropies. Slavery, a topic on which Marxists, unlike Marx himself, often go astray, did not preclude free labour (many people could not afford slaves, anyway), nor indeed labour militancy: strikes by bakers, builders, and mint workers are attested, also increasing peasant and slave unrest – interestingly concomitant with legal improvements of servile life. Rich evidences for such, and many associated details, provided by the likes of Lucian and Petronius, are altogether ignored.

The book stops too soon. Morley merely toys with theories of the West's 'Fall' and makes no attempt to explain the East's thousand years' survival. He alludes to Stalin's 1933 claim that slave revolts caused Rome's collapse. This may seem romanticisation of Marx's great admiration for Spartacus. But, Stalin had some support from the doyen of these studies, Edward Thompson, whose work Morley totally ignores in his Further Reading Guide.

Slavery is inextricably linked with Roman technology (or alleged lack of) in all such discussions. Again, Marx gets it right, unlike his epigones. Morley's scrappy engagement with this overlooks Marx' astute (*Kapital*, vol.1) spotting of a *Greek Anthology* poem on how the water-mill's invention 'liberated' slave-girls and his delicious comment, 'Oh those heathens! They understood nothing of political economy and Christianity. They did not, for example, comprehend that machinery is the surest means of lengthening the working day,' an aphorism endorsed in modern offices by e-mail!

Morley does not here ask the two key questions: why did so many 'one-off' ancient inventions never enter the mainstream? Why did the industrial revolution wait so long after slavery?

Some wonky (three dates discrepant between 'Timeline' and text) or improvable details: examples of modern Roman imperial iconography (p.2) omit the most blatant one, Washington, D.C. – cf. Gore Vidal on this. Cato ('cerebrotonic' in Auden's poem on Rome's Fall – worth quoting) DID have a military career and his African figs gimmick has been seen as a trick (allegedly coming from his own Italian estate); on interest rates (p.64), add the 'honourable Brutus' illegal 48 per cent rate, Brutus being clearly a man of high principle and higher interest.

It is unfair to accuse Roman sources of neglecting resistance to Roman rule (p.47). Tacitus easily refutes that – Morley himself prefixes pertinent quotations from the *Agricola* to chapters 2 and 4. Regarding the latter's claim that the naïve British did not see that Roman civilising benefits were actually instruments of slavery, Morley should have spread himself more

on this Tacitean attitude, dubbed 'remarkable for a Roman administrator' by his modern editors.

Morley attributes to Disraeli the words 'one of the greatest of the Romans, when asked what were his politics, replied, *Imperium et libertas*,' dismissing the Latin quotation as a fiction (p.9, second-hand). As such, that may be. Internet sites ascribe it to Cicero, without reference. Cicero did, though, in speeches (*Philippic* 5.37; *Against Catiline*, 4.24) yoke the two concepts together: *imperio libertatique communi* and *de imperio, de libertate, decernite*. Some attribute the speech to Lord Randolph Churchill instead of Disraeli: which is right? One may amusingly subjoin another Churchill – Winston himself – who misquoted Tacitus with his *imperium ac libertatem, res olim insociabiles, imperium* being a mistake for *principatum*. This nineteenth-century yoking in fact prompted Bernard Holland (1911) to publish *Imperium Et Libertas: A Study in History and Politics*.

Morley writes crisply, sometimes wittily, mercifully eschewing academic Newspeak. But, this book is not so novel as claimed. Perry Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974) did it much better. Also, Morley's criticism of other classicists for their alleged neglect of this approach is downright unfair, considering the work of Marxists such as Benjamin Farrington, George Thomson, Edward Thompson, and Geoffrey de Ste Croix, all of whom are disgracefully absent from his Further Reading, Notes, and Index. In the immortal words of American baseball coach and wit, Yogi Berra, this is 'déjà lu all over again'.

Barry Baldwin

Ireland and Beyond

Charlie McGuire, Sean McLoughlin: *Ireland's Forgotten Revolutionary*, Merlin Press, 2010, 224 pages, ISBN 9780850367058, £15.95

Sean McLoughlin was an Irish Communist who played a major role in the transformation of Irish politics that occurred between 1916 and 1924. Charlie McGuire has produced a very well researched book that shows that McLoughlin and his communist international values were an important component of this historically defining period.

Before the 1916 Rising, the overwhelmingly dominant ideology among the major political parties such as the Home Rule Party and the Unionist Party was total support for the British Empire. Throughout the 19th century

more than 30 per cent of the British Army were Irish, and more than 180,000 Irishmen, influenced by this ideology, volunteered to fight and die for the Empire in the imperialist 1914-18 war.

In that context, those like McLoughlin who marched out in 1916 to take on the greatest Empire the world had ever seen were very brave and committed. McLoughlin during the Rising was given battlefield promotion to Commandant-General of the Army of the Irish Republic because of leadership qualities. After the rising he played an important role in rebuilding the Irish Army, promoting the concept of hit-and-run tactics that proved so successful in its war against the British occupation. McLoughlin, deeply influenced by Connolly's socialism and the growth of communist ideology after the 1917 Revolution in Russia, became a key player in the more radical part of the complex network that made up the nationalist democratic alliance that led the political/military struggle against the British Empire. This radical strain was much stronger than is advocated by some historians, and McGuire's book is a major contribution to the reassessment of the continuation of the socialist tradition throughout the 1916-24 period.

In particular, because McLoughlin spent a good deal of time in Britain seeking to build support among British workers and Irish immigrants, and in building links with the global struggle for socialism by being part of the Comintern, the Irish war is placed firmly in the global conflict between communism and capitalism. McLoughlin's class analysis of the forces involved reflected this.

However, this analysis was deeply flawed. This reality explains why the 32-county Workers' Republic, advocated by McLoughlin, failed.

There are constant references to 'peasants'. As a consequence of the land wars in the 19th century, the British were forced to pass a series of land purchase bills which transferred ownership of the massive bulk of the land to the tenants (or peasants), so that by the 1916-24 period the vast majority of the people in Ireland were small farmers, not peasants, who effectively owned their land and had values that rejected social ownership of land. In fact, the working class in the 26 counties was very small, with only 13 per cent of the workforce involved in industrial manufacturing. At the same time, the commitment of a massive percentage of the workforce, in a 32 county context, to a unionist and imperialist ideology, centred in the four northern counties, is largely ignored.

Also, on a political level, what gave legitimacy to the national war of independence against the British Empire was the result of the 1918 election, which gave a decisive majority to Sinn Fein and their

establishment of the Dail Eireann (the Irish Parliament) in January 1919. Its Republican Army's war of independence against British Imperialism was based on that democratic mandate. When one of the major leaders of that war, Michael Collins, helped to negotiate a treaty, which was then put to the people with the argument that it provided the freedom to achieve freedom, a decisive majority of the people voted for it. McLoughlin did not accept their decision and took part in war against the Army of the Dail. McLoughlin, therefore, underestimated the very strong commitment to democracy by the Irish people. An ideology that rejects democracy is just not acceptable to the Irish people and it was this commitment that ensures that the fascist wave that swept across Europe in the 1920s and 30s found no deep roots in Ireland.

Defeated, McLoughlin finally advises a return to politics and seeks to rebuild an Irish Communist Party, and came into political conflict with Larkin. At the same time, after the death of Collins, his successors founded the Cumann na nGaedheal Party, which rallied the most reactionary class elements and held power until 1932. They made Ireland a very cold place for radicals like McLoughlin who left the country in 1924 and never played a major role in politics again.

This book, however, proves decisively that the radical socialist tradition did not die with Connolly in 1916. McLoughlin and others sought to ensure its continuation in very difficult circumstances.

The massive economic crisis that has occurred now, with the failure of the neo-liberal militarist ideology, has resulted in 40 per cent of the people voting for the broad left in Ireland, the largest in our history. As the crisis of capitalism deepens in Ireland and throughout the world, McLoughlin's commitment to linking the national and international struggle for social justice provides inspiration to those who seek to continue that tradition. So McGuire's book should be on the recommended reading list, not just for those interested in history, but also for those involved in the current struggle. We need to learn from his mistakes.

Roger Cole
Chair, Peace & Neutrality Alliance, Ireland
www.pana.ie