

# Reviews

## Our History

**John McIlroy, Alan Campbell & Joan Allen (editors), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, Merlin Press, 2010, 400 pages, paperback ISBN 978085036877, £18.95**

I greatly enjoyed this book, although I would not recommend reading it in a single sitting. There is a lot to take in and numerous changes in perspective to accommodate. When I was young I could never understand why people kept writing new books about the same period in history. Now, I am a bit like the person in the Bob Dylan song who was ‘so much older then’ but is ‘younger than that now’!

It requires perspective and some distance to understand the real significance of events, and this collection of essays does that in spades. Interestingly, the event it both commemorates and celebrates is the birth of the Society for the Study of Labour History. The editors say,

‘Histories of Labour, which documents the development of the subject in a variety of countries around the world, is published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH), its organised expression in Britain.’

In the introduction, Eric Hobsbawm explains how this seminal event occurred, and how the idea of the Society ‘came from the collective of friends formed in the Communist Party Historians’ Group’. At the height of the Cold War, even Hobsbawm was finding it hard to get published; difficult to believe now, given his status as a ‘national treasure’ and the Order of Merit.

The man chosen to front this new Society was Asa Briggs, then easily the most established academic historian with a record of work in the field. What exactly this field is, over fifty years and numerous changes in historiography, I found more difficult to pin down. The best definition occurs in the final essay, by Marcel van der Linden, Research Director of the International Institute of Social History and Professor of Social Movement History at the University of Amsterdam:

‘The term “labour history” has a dual meaning. Strictly speaking the concept refers to the history of the labour movement: parties, trade unions, co-operatives, strikes and related phenomena. More broadly interpreted, the

concept denotes the history of the working classes: the development of labour relations, family life, mentalities, culture. This ambiguity seems characteristic of the term in English. In many other languages labour movement history and working-class history cannot be summed up in a single term.’

By the time I got to this final chapter, having worried at this ambiguity throughout the book, I was glad to see it confirmed. Van der Linden continues that both this ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ Labour History have their origins in the North Atlantic region, so it is good to see the impact that this school of thought, if that is not too strong a term, has had internationally.

There are fascinating essays from India and Japan, where both labour history and Labour History have taken significantly different turns. Although there appear to be two threads that echo across the world, the first is the enormous impact of Edward Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*. Van der Linden again,

‘In the 1960s we see the beginnings of the so called “new labour history”, with E.P.Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* as a landmark publication. This great book, by emphasizing culture and consciousness, integrated broad and narrow labour history, once its message was assimilated.’

Of course, this transition can be exaggerated, but I do not think it would be inaccurate to argue that almost all Labour History since has been a dialogue with this great work. Who, having read it, can forget that wonderful preface, written in Halifax in 1962, and Thompson’s hope that he was:

‘seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity.’

Thompson did something else, as well, I think, and that is to break the almost Whiggish nature of much so-called Marxist writing of Labour History, which saw the continuous march of organised labour to state power as inevitable. Whilst nothing could have been more literally English about Thompson’s work, it had a huge international impact, which is reflected here.

In his essay, ‘Organised Labour History in Britain’, John McIlroy, points out that:

‘It was said of Thompson that he “opened new ways of enquiring into the past in India and Latin America, ... He has influenced Chinese labour historians and inspired the feminist scholar of Arab texts, Fatima Mernissi”. He lectured in Canada and the USA and maintained his family’s links with India. His influence marked the developments in labour history in all three countries.’

This canonisation of Thompson is not to diminish the work of other scholars, but it does point up the huge contribution to both broad and

narrow Labour History from those outside the academy and the fact that institutionalised university history has never been quite sure what to do with the history of the lower orders.

The second thread is that, well before the forward march of labour was halted, in Eric Hobsbawm's immortal phrase, the subject matter had begun to fragment with new dimensions to the central ambiguity. Some of these developments, especially the interest of feminists, have been very welcome, while others, such as the so-called 'linguistic turn', less so.

Hobsbawm suspects that what made British Labour history influential, however, apart from the sheer size of the community and the high quality of some of the work produced, was 'its function as a catalyst of political rethinking on the British left':

'Neither E.P. Thompson's *Making* or Raph Samuel's initiatives, the *History Workshop* movement, nor my *Primitive Rebels*, can be fully understood except as an attempt to find a way forward in left politics through historical reflection.'

Anyone interested in Labour History will find terrific value in this book. I found references to works with which I was not familiar, and I will now seek them out to fill gaps in my understanding. Readers will gain huge benefits from the references and bibliography. I particularly welcome the opportunity to look at Labour History through the prism of the Indian, Japanese and German experience, which these international essays give us.

If I have one disappointment, it is that, although van der Linden mentions co-operation in his definition, as a co-operator I found only one reference in the index to 'Co-operation', and then it is in the context of the Canadian Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Clearly there is work still to be done, and I hope the next fifty years of organised labour history are as rich as the first fifty, and we will continue to look for ways forward in left thinking with active historical reflection.

*Nick Matthews*

*Chair of the UK Society for Co-operative Studies*

## **Arcadians Both**

**A. S. S. Praver, *Karl Marx and World Literature*, Verso, 480 pages, paperback ISBN 9781844677108, 16.99**

Verso advertise this as a New Edition. In fact, it is a straight reprint, albeit with appropriate cover-picture of the British Museum Reading Room, of the 1976 Oxford original.

A missed opportunity. Perhaps Prawer (now 86) was not up to revisions. But, surely some editor/researcher could have been conscripted?

Though opulent for its time, the Bibliography needs considerable updating. For easy instance, Prawer was pre-Internet. There are now countless relevant sites, e.g. an English translation of Marx's thesis on Greek atomism, lauded by the emphatically non-Marxist classicist Cyril Bailey as 'astonishing in its knowledge, arresting in its conclusions' (*Classical Quarterly* 22, 1928, pp. 205-06 – unnoticed by Prawer). He must just have missed the superlative *Capital* edition of Mandel & Fowkes (1976). Regrets over non-appearance of an edition of Marx's *New York Daily Tribune* articles have been appeased by James Ledbetter's Penguin (2007); cf. Francis Wheen's expanded foreword in *TLS* March 23, 2007, 14-15. Prawer's snide remark (p. 295 n.42) about Raymond Williams' failure to engage with Marx was outdated a year later by the latter's *Marxism and Literature*. To adapt Mrs Thatcher's (in)famous slogan, I could go on and on.

There was equal scope for cleaning up some false details on both Prawer's and Marx's parts: the latter's *iterum Crispinus* greeting to Engels (p. 185) is from Juvenal's Fourth Satire, not the First; the same poet's joke about will-making (p. 267) is put into the wrong context; Cicero's jest on two seers meeting (p. 192) is not from his *De Divinatione* but *De Natura Deorum* 1.7.

There was also room for index improvement. Prawer provided only one, for names; a book like this cries out for one of major topics. The onomastic inventory is slovenly. One egregious case is the omission of Juvenal, an author much liked and quoted by Marx, and frequently in Prawer himself (pp. 133, 185, 239, 267, 342, 385).

Final cavil: I have not trawled for misleading misprints, but someone should have, given the survival of the howler (p. 139) 'monks write silly lines of Catholic saints' – 'lines' should obviously be 'lives' – thus spoiling an acerbic thrust in the *Communist Manifesto*.

This said, a reprint of Prawer's book, rightly hailed on its epiphany as a classic by critics from George Steiner ('a landmark in comparative literature in Britain') to *Tribune's* 'one of the most important books about Marx yet written in English' is most welcome after 35 years, perhaps introducing it to younger readers. Old hands will know and treasure it, save perhaps Eric Hobsbawm, who ignores it in his *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011*, where it would greatly have enriched his own skimpy sentence (p. 137) on Marx and Engels' knowledge and exploitation of ancient authors and history.

Speaking of which, Prawer (p.3) rightly begins by finding in Marx's schoolboy Latin essay on Roman history (cf. my edition, *Archiv für*

*Kulturgeschichte* 70, 1988, pp. 101-07) germs of his mature thought, a welcome departure from David McLennan's dismissal (*Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*, 1973, p.10) of it as 'uninteresting'.

'Very few men have read as much, and as intelligently, as M. Marx' (Bakunin). Answering his daughters' 1865 questionnaire, Marx gave his favourite occupation as 'Bookworming'. Same applies to Prawer, whose previous 10 books (1952-73) on German and comparative literature, especially Heine and Shakespeare (giants bulking large in Marx) had paved the way for this one. Since then, he has produced as many more, including studies of cinematic classics *Blue Angel*, *Caligari*, *Nosferatu*. Lenin famously dubbed cinema 'the 10<sup>th</sup> Muse'; Marx would surely have agreed – what would they have made of the 'Blogosphere'?

As Prawer richly demonstrates, Marx was a great devourer of novels in various languages, my cue for observing that his sister is the Booker Prize-winning Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, also known as screenwriter for Merchant Ivory.

'Prawer explores the overlooked ways in which the world of imaginative literature – poems, novels, plays – infused and shaped Marx's writings, from his unpublished correspondence to his pamphlets and major works' – publisher's blurb, for once to the point. It is jolting to realise (p. 148 n. 25) that the immortal slogans 'Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains', 'The workers have no country', 'Exploitation of men by men', and 'nexus of cash payment' are actually quotations from Bazard, Carlyle, and Marat. How many know that (*New-York Daily Tribune*, 1 Feb. 1859, = *Marx Engels Werke (MEW)* xii, p.683) Marx published a parody of Samuel Johnson, whose own schoolboy essay on Roman history and literature (cf. my edition, *Latomus* 67, 2008, pp. 1041-46) is sometimes uncannily close to Marx's – serendipity: no way Marx could have read it.

This material might sometimes have been better organised, notably in linking Marx's repetition of (especially) Graeco-Roman literary references from earlier works (*Grundrisse*, etc.) to *Capital*. These are scattered throughout various chapters; it would have been easier for the reader to present them more closely.

Likewise, though Prawer gives Marx his due for irony, parody, and devastatingly witty personal attacks, there might have been a more focused section on his humour. As Trotskyist-cricketer C. L. R. James observed, 'Marx is a very funny man, very comic in a very profound way'. Such hostile individuals as Paul Johnson and A. J. P. Taylor admitted his 'brilliant use of epigrams and aphorisms'. As I began my own survey of this (*Morning Star*, March 2, 2011), 'Which famous treatise on economics dismisses a rival's (sc. Proudhon) as "shit" and details an aristocratic

lady's skill at fellatio?'

In a letter (October 18, 1853 = *MEW* xxxix, p. 390) to Adolf Cluss (not in Praver), Marx dubs Engels 'a veritable walking encyclopaedia'. This compliment, which Marx modelled on the standard Byzantine Greek accolade 'Living Library and Walking Museum', applies equally well to Marx and Praver themselves, a pair whose shared love and mastery of literature deserve the Virgilian (*Eclogue* 7. 4 – a favourite of Marx) *Arcades ambo* – 'Arcadians both'.

Barry Baldwin

## Hammered

**Shannon D. Beebe and Mary Kaldor, *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon: Human Security and the New Rules of War and Peace*, Public Affairs, 2010, 288 pages, ISBN 9781586488239 £15.99**

When I first saw *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon* – the title of this book – my heart lifted. It's going, I thought, to be about the uselessness of nuclear weapons and the ongoing insecurity which they ensure. I was wrong. The 'ultimate weapon' of the title is war itself. The message, coming from two very different authors, is the same. We cannot today, if ever we could, achieve security just by military means. Yet we annually spend globally some \$1,630,000,000,000 attempting to do so. By far the largest slice of this enormous expenditure is the responsibility of the United States alone.

Real human security today means freedom from 'poverty, disease, violence and tyranny'. To achieve such goals, in the view of the authors, there has to be some kind of partnership between the civilian and the military world. In making her case Mary Kaldor, in particular, has shown great courage in visiting war zones in many places, some certainly very dangerous. How well I remember the kidnapping of Norman Kember and the long wait and many vigils before he was released.

Mary is, of course, an academic, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics. She played an influential part in the Helsinki process and the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign in the 1980s.

Shannon Beebe is a United States Lieutenant Colonel who was attached to the US Embassy in Angola when the book was written. He played a major role in the establishment of the US Unified Command for Africa

(AFRICOM) – which I don't like the sound of at all. It exists apparently 'to support US Government objectives'.

I am not sure that their new redefinition of security as human security is quite as new as they suggest. Some have travelled before on that road. Pope Paul VI in his letter *Populorum Progressio* of 1967 deserves a bit of credit. The 4<sup>th</sup> Section of that document is even headed 'Development is the new name for Peace'.

No matter. The lesson has still to be learnt by politicians and military alike. Influential people still behave as if they can bomb people into peace. '*The man who is equipped only with a hammer sees every problem as a nail*' still describes the illusions under which most of the military suffer.

What is new about this book is the recommendation that there ought to be some sort of partnership between the military and the many non-governmental organisations who flock to war zones bringing with them zeal and compassion certainly, but often also competition for publicity and funds.

The authors both agree that there is a 'role for force in human security operations' – but this is not quite the same as waging war for peace. Far more important is to try to make sure that any military action is aimed at the establishment of human rights and the basic standards of human life – food, education, medical provision and political rights – which we take for granted. Indeed, military action is only legitimate, according to Article 42 of the UN Charter, when the Security Council is satisfied that all peaceful means of resolving conflict have been exhausted.

Condoleezza Rice has yet to learn such lessons. In an interview for the *New York Times* in 2000, quoted in this book, she said of such a new approach '*Carrying out civil administration and police functions is simply going to degrade the American capability to do the things America has to do. We don't need to have the 82 Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten*'. Perhaps America does not have to do the things that some Americans think they have to do.

This is a stimulating and even optimistic book, which humanitarian NGOs as well as the military ought to read. Its focus is clearly on the recent overseas wars in which, unhappily, we have been involved. If we are moving away from a world of war to one of global policing and community building, so much the better.

I would have liked, however, to have heard more about the current global culture of war which so dominates today in education and the media. We cannot export a culture of peace and a respect for human rights unless they also flourish in the world of wealth and power.

*Bruce Kent*

## Hammar skjold

**Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammar skjold? The UN, The Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, 368 pages, Hurst & Co, 2011, hardback ISBN 9781849041584, £20**

If you want to read a riveting detective story, in this case based on real events and real people, some of world importance, then this is the book for you. It is, moreover, a convincing response to those like Niall Ferguson, who see much of benefit for the colonised peoples in the British Empire. Dag Hammar skjold, as the UN Secretary General from 1953 until his death in 1961, was committed totally to supporting the liberation movements in colonial territories in Asia and Africa. One such was the Congo, where the elected African President, Patrice Lumumba, had been assassinated by the colonial powers with the connivance of the United States. Since then, Katanga, the main copper producing region of the Congo, had declared its independence under the leadership of Moïse Tshombe, on the initiative of the colonial powers, Britain and Belgium, with the support of the United States.

Hammar skjold was determined to maintain a united Congo's independence, and to use United Nations forces to maintain peace between Katanga and the rest of the Congo. To this end he had arranged to meet Tshombe in Ndola in Northern Rhodesia in September 1961. White African leaders, and most especially Sir Roy Welensky, leader of the British colony of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, were equally determined to stop Hammar skjold's initiative, even to the extent of eliminating him.

African liberation movements were gaining strength everywhere. 1960 was the year in which UK Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, had spoken of 'the wind of change blowing through Africa'. This was the setting in which Hammar skjold's plane had crashed on its approach to Ndola.

What Susan Williams has done sixty years later is to bring together the whole range of different views and interpretations of the fatal crash. She has written a number of Penguin books on Africa and is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies of London University. Williams has scoured the world for evidence about Hammar skjold's death, from the official inquiries made at the time, to the recollections of those and their relatives who were in and near Ndola at the time, the memories and messages of secret service officers in Europe, Africa and the USA and, most interestingly, from Archbishop Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Finally, from ex-US President Harry Truman she takes the words which summed up what is

her conclusion: 'They killed him!' But who were they?

Williams has no answer to that question, and her book is designed to encourage the UN to reopen the inquiry into 'who killed Hammarskjöld?' She starts with certain facts that seem unusual: the airport was closed, contrary to regulation, as soon as Hammarskjöld's plane did not come; no search party was sent out until the afternoon after the plane's non-arrival; the judgement of Lord Alport, the British High Commissioner, was accepted, that Hammarskjöld had decided to go elsewhere; finally, and most significant, no post mortem was carried out on those survivors who were examinable. These included Hammarskjöld himself and his two guards. Some 'doctoring', moreover, had been carried out on the photographs of these, which concealed any evidence of the bullet wounds that some observers had noticed. These wounds were explained by some investigators as being the result of the explosion of unused cartridges in the crash, but firearms experts consulted by Susan Williams doubted this explanation.

There were three official inquiries initiated at the time to discover what had happened. The first was by the Ndola air traffic authority which described the plane's non arrival, despite messages that it had started its descent to the airport at an unexpectedly low level, and concluded with an open verdict on the reasons for the crash. The second was an inquiry conducted by the Rhodesian authorities. They rejected all evidence from black African witnesses as either incompetent or prejudiced against white opinion, dismissed the idea of a second plane's involvement and of a second explosion, and concluded that the crash was due to landing errors on the part of the Swedish pilot, so that the plane crashed into a wood. The third inquiry, carried out by the UN, included much evidence of black African witnesses, recording two explosions, a second plane flying past, and a visit to the site of the crash the following day by some vehicle before the official search party arrived. But this inquiry left an open verdict on the cause of the crash. Susan Williams's researches have raised many more questions that have led her to request a new UN inquiry.

There is no doubt that the white authorities in Africa at the time wished to be rid of Hammarskjöld, but how they proposed to do that and what agency was used from the intelligence services and the mercenary forces is still unclear. At the very least, Williams would hope to clear the name of the Swedish pilot, whose family feel deeply offended by the slur on his competence. There is some evidence that he had an English speaker and an African interpreter in the cockpit with him, so as to be sure that he understood the messages from Ndola airport. But the book is filled with fascinating and unexplained stories which have grown up around the tragic

death of someone who is now recognised as a very great man, perhaps the greatest of the UN's General Secretaries.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Revival at a Price!

**M. I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Society*, Routledge, 334 pages, hardback ISBN 9780415694803, £85**

This Routledge Revival (from 1978) comprises 14 'seminal' articles by well-known scholars on sundry classical topics. Perhaps supererogatory: all are on-line. But, it is convenient for those who prefer old-fashioned print to flickering screens.

All derive from *Past & Present*, a journal founded in 1952 by a coterie of Marxist and non-Marxist historians, including Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and E. P. Thompson, associated in the Communist Party Historians' Group.

Their editor was Trevor Aston, whose wild behaviour (induced by manic depression) at Corpus Christi, Oxford, drove its President, champagne-socialist Hellenist Kenneth Dover – as revealed in his 1994 memoir *Marginal Comment* – to consider murdering him, a scheme pre-empted by Aston's suicide.

Moses Finley (né Finkelstein) was an American classicist, initially influenced by the Marxist-leaning *Institut für Sozialforschung*, the so-called Frankfurt School, now based in New York. Other intellectual mentors were Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi and American counterpart Wesley Mitchell, both Weberians. A less fortunate link was to *Institut* member Karl Wittfogel, former German communist, who named Finley to the red-hunting Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, resulting in his dismissal by Rutgers University.

Unemployed and unemployable, Finley moved to Cambridge, initially to Jesus College – Moses in the arms of Jesus – where he became Professor of Ancient History.

Finley was – his star is now somewhat in eclipse – credited with revolutionising British classical studies, extending the traditional emphasis on literature and philology to economic and social history. While professing sympathy for Marxism at the philosophical level, Finley remained Weberian, though increasingly eclectic.

The bee buzzing loudest in Finley's ear was a belief that modern

economic theories cannot explain ancient economic life, the Greeks and Romans having no such conception. This obviously involves jettisoning much of Marx. Finley pursued his dogma through many books and articles, notably *The Ancient Economy* (1973). His approach has come under fire from various quarters, most convincingly from Kevin Greene who (*Economic History Review* 53, 2000, pp. 29-59) rightly deplored his neglect of ancient technological innovation (cf. my Preface to the 2001 *Spokesman* re-issue of Benjamin Farrington's *Head and Hand in Ancient Greece*).

Finley opens the batting with essays on Athenian demagogues (a Greek word) and Aristotle's economic analysis or lack thereof. He gives the former an overdue appreciation against their usual bad ancient and modern press. One may add the long-lived radical influence of cobblers; cf. my 'Ancient Socialism' (*Spokesman* 112, 2011, pp. 60-61) and Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People* (1998).

In denying any ancient concept of Economy, Finley barks up the wrong tree. Athenian imperial tribute lists, their well-developed banking system, constant arguments over who had or should have the money, Aristotle's anticipation (*Politics* 1. 4. 1253b) of Marx on correlation between technological advance and industrial production, Roman emperor Diocletian's wage and price controls – I could go on – all militate against his aberrant notion.

John Briscoe on Rome and Greek class struggle reaches the unsurprising conclusion that the senatorial government preferred upper-class or oligarchic regimes: essentially the policy of modern America.

Peter Brunt expiscates the actions and causes of Roman mob violence, observing that this was not restricted to one social class. Much here strikes contemporary notes: the 2011 London riots, the 'Arab Spring', American political gridlock. His comparison of urban Romans and Londoners on annual harvesting 'holidays' evokes Orwell's memorable accounts of same. Brunt also stresses the vital point, seen by Marx if not all Marxists, that slavery did not preclude a free working class, strong enough to flex some industrial muscle; cf. my 'Strikes in the Roman Empire,' *Classical Journal* 59 (1963), pp. 275-276.

Keith Hopkins and Paul Weaver separately examine social mobility in the Roman Empire, more attainable than in Athens. Both rightly commend emperor Claudius' promotion of ex-slaves to high civil service posts, his meritocratic policy overriding traditional Roman class prejudice (Juvenal and Tacitus abound in this). Albeit fictional, Petronius' Trimalchio – the Roman Horatio Alger – would have endorsed their argument.

Peter Garnsey offers a complex but rich exposition of how Roman law

became a respecter of persons. Augustine's class-based punishments for Donatist revolutionaries are a blatant later case; cf. my 'Peasant Revolt in Africa,' *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 6 (1962), pp. 1-11. Garnsey's allusion (p, 165 n.90) to ever-harsher penalties is now manifest in Ramsay McMullen's stomach-turning 'Judicial Savagery,' *Chiron* 16 (1986), pp. 147-166.

Ewan Bowie's paper on literary perspectives of the Greek Sophistic is the longest, also perhaps of least interest to *Spokesman* readers. He seeks to understand Greek predilection for lectures and books on their glorious Hellenic past against the reality of their Roman present. The answer seems obvious enough: cultural and national nostalgia. Comparable is the dream of Harold Macmillan (recently echoed by Nick Clegg) that Britain can play Greeks to American Romans.

Geoffrey de Ste Croix (Marxist) and Adrian Sherwin-White (emphatically not) duel over the next three essays on reasons for early Roman Christian persecution, postluded by William Frend on its ultimate failure. Straightforward enough, I've always thought. Nero scapegoated Christians for the Great Fire of Rome. Trajan invoked Caesar's clampdown on organised groups (*collegia*). Marcus Aurelius (in military crisis) was alarmed by its pacifist strain. Christ's very Jewishness caused suspicion: had he been British – quite a thought – things would have been different. Persecution failed because of the impressively endless line-up of martyrs, an appealing message of social justice on earth and in heaven, and Church philanthropy – the last pagan emperor, Julian, complained Christianity had 'out-charitied' him.

Arnold Jones contributes a highly technical account of how Constantine and succeeding Christian emperors instituted and solidified peasant serfdom, something of obvious comparative interest to students of mediaeval and Russian equivalents.

The volume concludes with Edward Thompson on peasant revolts, a subject he pioneered and made his own: not many scholars have had both first and last word on anything. This, and his many other articles and books, came with a Marxist approach. Thompson himself was a CPGB member until Hungary, then briefly a member of Healey's Socialist Labour League (né 'The Group'). Other historians affectionately joked that he had 'invented' the later Roman Empire – a fitting epitaph.

Overall, a well-produced if skimpily indexed collection, offering much food for thought to readers of all persuasions.

*Barry Baldwin*

## Agent Orange – Fifty Years On

**Fred A. Wilcox, *Scorched Earth: Legacies of Chemical Warfare in Vietnam*, Seven Stories Press, 2011, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9781609801380 £15.99**

This is the most disturbing book I have read for a long time. In 1984, Fred Wilcox wrote *Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange*, which told the story of the US veteran soldiers of the 1961-1975 war in Vietnam, several hundred thousand of them, who had suffered from the US Forces' spraying of Vietnam's woods and crops with the herbicide dioxin. A US veterans' class action suit was then settled out of court with the US chemical companies for \$180 million. No payment was ever made to the three million or more Vietnamese who suffered even worse from the herbicide spraying by companies that had made millions of dollars out of their chemical sales to the US Forces. Fred Wilcox made three visits to Vietnam to collect evidence, accompanied by his son to take photographs, with the aim of winning support for compensation to the Vietnamese sufferers. This book is the result of Wilcox's researches into the continuing human suffering, some forty years after the initial spraying, whose effects have always been denied by companies and governments. Most Americans wish to forget what happened in that disastrous war.

Wilcox's stories of the illnesses, the fatal cancers and continuing irritations and pains, the terrible deformities of children born with swollen heads, no legs or arms, conjoined twins, monsters or just a bag of bits in the womb, makes terrible reading. Even worse is the fact that these horrors continue from generation to generation. Women in affected areas can never know what to expect from their womb. Wilcox has collected the most moving letters replying to his appeal for stories, and he has gone on to argue in a number of television interviews that the cancer epidemic in the US and elsewhere is, in part, the result of the chemical companies' crop spraying. That too has been denied and is equally difficult to prove.

How can it be, then, that appeals from Vietnam to the US chemical companies and to successive US Governments alike have fallen on deaf ears? It was said at first by the US Forces that the spraying of trees and crops was required because the Communists' troops hid in the vegetation to make their surprise attacks on American positions. The chemical companies knew how toxic their sprays were, but, as they were not aimed directly at people, claimed that they did not come within the international laws that forbade the use of chemical warfare. US Governments accepted this claim.

When more and more evidence appeared that showed how toxic spraying was affecting people, including US soldiers, a new argument was deployed.

No experimental tests have been carried out to discover the effects of dioxin on human beings. All the evidence comes from tests on animals. The results mimic exactly what was found in human sufferers, but this gives the lawyers a get-out. There is no proof. It can be shown that certain human illnesses and certain deformities follow after dioxin spraying, but *post hoc* (after this) does not prove *propter hoc* (because of this). Certain illnesses and deformities could be shown to occur far more frequently among people exposed to toxic spraying than among the rest of the population, but that does not prove cause and effect. Judge Jack Weinstein of the Brooklyn Federal Court is shown by Wilcox to have been a master of this line of argument, in defence equally of the chemical companies and of US Governments. What Wilcox's new book will do to dent that argument remains to be seen, but I have little hope from Obama. It was the Obama Administration that offered three million dollars to 'clear up the problem' – for three million people! – one dollar per person! The whole story is literally a crying shame. As I write this, my granddaughter is showing me her two lovely healthy babies. It is hard not to cry.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Key Words

**Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Routledge Revivals, 2011, 288 pages, hardback ISBN 9780415509190, £75**

What a thrill to review *Keywords*, a bible for all students of political vocabulary. First published in 1976, by Croom Helm, this pricey new edition comes without the notes on a further twenty-one words, including 'anarchism', 'ecology' and 'sex', plus revisions to the original entries, contained in the author's 'revised and expanded' edition of 1983, to which he contributed a new preface acknowledging those such as Daniel Bell, Perry Anderson and Christopher Hill who had commented on the original publication, which is reproduced, unaltered, here.

Notwithstanding its incompleteness (there is not even a mention of the 1983 edition), this Revival is to be welcomed, not least because it is legible. The text is clearly printed, with **bold-face** and *italic* type highlighting each particular word, and its variants, under discussion. Contrast this with the blotchy paperback edition currently peddled by

Harper Collins under their Fontana imprint (part of the ailing Murdoch empire). Such cheapskate production undermines the very purpose of *Keywords* as it is often impossible to distinguish what is in bold-face type and what is not.

There is something of an irony that, in the age of the ebook, Routledge has chosen to 'revive' a hardback and incomplete edition of *Keywords*. The issue of electronic rights would hardly have arisen during Williams's lifetime. Presumably, Routledge's extensive archive of contracts, which they seem to be mining for this impressive series, also largely predates the era of electronic publishing. Nevertheless, they have announced more than 300 such Revivals from back catalogues, including works from the 1920s by Max Beer (*The Life and Teaching of Karl Marx*) and Nikolai (sic) Bukharin (*Historical Materialism*), as well as rather more recent works such as Alec Nove's *Was Stalin Really Necessary?* (1964) and Sidney Pollard's *The Wasting of the British Economy* (1982).

What's going on here? Presumably, Taylor & Francis (itself part of the Informa group of businesses), which holds the Routledge imprint, perceives a market for such highly priced hardback editions. (More affordable paperback editions are available for some titles.) This market is unlikely to be in the UK. Is it in the new universities of Asia and elsewhere? More fundamentally, do these Revivals imply recognition of the readability of much of this twentieth century scholarship, stretching from the 1920s to the 1980s, perhaps by contrast with the output of more recent, neo-liberal decades? Most important of all, is there a growing appetite for socialist discourse? Routledge Revivals rather suggests there is.

'Neo-liberal' is not to be found in any of the editions of *Keywords*. Williams was writing his 'Vocabulary of Culture and Society' at around the time the miners were getting rid of the Heath Government, in 1974, and shortly before the IMF set about getting rid of the Callaghan Government, starting in 1976. Proposals for import controls, exchange controls, and controls on capital movements, all part of a broader discussion about an 'alternative economic strategy for the Labour Movement' in the face of unfolding crisis, were taken very seriously by those in the City of London and elsewhere who benefited from the Eurodollar and associated trades. So it was that the neo-Liberals emerged. Raymond Williams sheds some light on their history when he writes:

'**Liberalism** is then a doctrine of certain necessary kinds of freedom but also, and essentially, a doctrine of possessive individualism'.

Nuance is everything, and Williams is a most reliable guide.

*Tony Simpson*

## What about Empire?

**Peadar Kirby and Mary P. Murphy, *Towards a Second Republic: Irish Politics after the Celtic Tiger*, Pluto Press 2011, 232 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745330563 £60, paperback ISBN 9780745330556 £17.99**

The first Irish Republic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, established in Easter 1916, was forced after seven days by the military power of British Imperialism to agree to an unconditional surrender. The second Irish Republic, established in January 1919, went to war with the British occupation forces and when its leaders agreed a treaty with the Empire, they made it clear that the 26 county Free State was only a stepping stone to the Republic. The Second Republic the authors refer to, however, seems primarily to mean not the Republic but this 26 County State created under threat of a ‘terrible’ war.

The book also states that the partition of Ireland was due to the events which occurred between 1916 and 1922. Apparently, the creation of an illegal army, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), in 1912, and the widespread support for it among British imperialists, including a substantial section of the British Tory Party and senior British Army officers, had little to do with it. This reviewer is unlikely to be alone in rejecting this view. In fact, the concept of imperialism is never mentioned anywhere in the book, a somewhat unusual understanding of British/Irish relations over many decades.

Neither is the rejection of the role of imperialism by the book purely historical. It admits Ireland’s policy of neutrality (the Irish republicans that negotiated with Britain in the 1920s sought for it to become permanent) was ‘claimed’ to be under threat by the decision of Fianna Fail to allow US troops to use Shannon Airport in their imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. ‘Small groups’ opposed the integration of the Republic of Ireland into the militarisation of the European Union and managed to win two referendums.

*Towards a Second Republic* states that the process by which Fianna Fail/Fine Gael and Labour in EU treaty after EU treaty have integrated this state into the militarisation of the European Union appears to have been ‘resolved’ by Irish Army participation in the EU Battlegroups. This support of the process of the all Ireland integration into the US/EU/NATO axis is clearly exposed by the fact that all the quoted authors in this section, Dorr, Tonra, Laffan and O’Mahony, have been longstanding supporters of the EU imperialist project. While the book is critical of the growth of neo-liberal economic values within the EU, any book on Irish politics that

excludes the role of imperialism past and present is deeply flawed.

However, it remains a good read for those interested in Irish Social Democratic politics. It provides a very good critical analysis of the commitment by the élite (especially Fianna Fail) to the neo-liberal economic policies of low taxes, 'light touch' regulation, and privatization, which led to the massive economic crisis. They also are very good in showing how social partnership ensured that, at virtually every level, the leadership of civil society, including almost the entire leadership of the Irish trade union movement, bought into this neo-liberal militarist agenda with very little protest.

*Towards a Second Republic* makes the case that the future could be either the continuation of the dominant neo-liberal ideology, 'a more socially just form of capitalism' or, less likely, an ecological/socialist model. Despite the fact that the ownership of the corporate media remains firmly in the hands of neo-liberals, the obvious reality of their responsibility for the crisis has definitely weakened their ideological power and, as the author's state, 'the realm of ideas has for the first time in a century become a battleground'. This book is an important part of that battleground. The massive austerity package imposed first by the Fianna Fail/Green Party, and now the Fine Gael/Labour Party governments, in order to ensure the bankers get all their money, has seen the collapse of the Fianna Fail Party and the election of virtually the only Labour Party radical as President of Ireland. The latest poll (December 2011) showed a dramatic shift in support for Sinn Fein, the United Left Alliance (ULA) and other progressive forces.

The authors quote the Bank of Ireland Asset Management Report of 2007 which showed that 5% of the population owned 40% of the wealth, 75% owned 58% and 20% owned 2%. This division of wealth, up to 2007, created a stable middle class that continually elected Fianna Fail to government. The crisis of capitalism, however, is rapidly destroying the wealth of the 75%, driving them down to the level of the 20%. In such circumstances, the last poll could just be an example of electoral volatility, and a fascist option, tried by Fine Gael in the 1930s, could just as easily be added to their list of options, as can be seen by the rise of such parties in Finland, Holland and Hungary, which are also suffering from the crisis. As yet it has not happened in Ireland, a fact not unrelated to our deeply rooted anti-imperialist tradition.

Finally, towards the end of *Towards a Second Republic*, the authors quote Ireland's major exponent of anti-imperialism, James Connolly, a member of the government of the First Republic who, from his writings, would not be satisfied with a more socially just form of capitalism, but

sought the creation of a Workers' Republic. It could be that, as the crisis of capitalism deepens, this model, not mentioned in the book, could emerge as the only option, the only model for a Republic. We shall see.

*Roger Cole*

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## **Ken for London**

**Ken Livingstone, *You Can't Say That*, Faber and Faber 2011, 720 pages, ISBN 9780571280384, £25.00**

This autobiography of Ken Livingstone provides a fascinating account of the life, both personal and political, of one of the most colourful and committed leading figures in the history of the Labour Party. The text is, however, more than an autobiography. It is a vigorous assertion of a radical view of the future of society, based on the interests of working people. He argues for full employment, decent working conditions, social security, good and affordable housing, the protection of civil rights, including the rights of minorities, and the preservation of peace and the end of imperialism.

*You Can't Say That* provides a lively commentary on many events in Labour's more recent history during the years of his participation. It also offers observations on prominent personalities in British politics, including the labour movement. One of the attractive features of the autobiography is the evident modesty of the author. In dealing with his childhood and adolescence, for example, he makes no exaggerated claims of academic distinction. His progress at school was modest and he does not hesitate to say so. He is content to emphasise the development of his lifelong interest in the world of nature; animals, insects and particularly pond-life. Indeed, one of his early ambitions was to secure employment in zoology. He ultimately trained as a teacher.

Ken Livingstone was born and brought up in a South London working-class family. He was born in 1945. His father was not a Labour supporter. He says of his parents' politics that the only policy of the 1945 Labour Government they supported was the foundation of the National Health Service.

Ken's first political awakening came with the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The assassination of John F. Kennedy also influenced him. He noted with approval that Roy Jenkins, as Labour Home Secretary, liberalised censorship, divorce, abortion and homosexuality. He was influenced towards the left in politics by two books he read as a young man. The first

was Orwell's *1984* and the second was *From Yalta to Vietnam* by David Horowitz, which 'demonstrated the lengths to which the US would go to overthrow governments to secure economic advantage'. Ken Livingstone adds: 'The US propped up brutal dictatorships as long as they could siphon off wealth or use land for military bases while claiming to defend democracy from communism'.

Ken eventually joined the Labour Party in 1969. He quickly became an active member. In an early contribution to a debate at a Labour Party meeting he called for a reduction in military spending and he opposed any curtailment of trade union rights. His support for trade unionism has been consistent throughout his adult life. He writes also that he was happy to work with Marxist splinter groups 'on issues where we agreed', but he believed that more could be achieved 'if we could radicalise the Labour Party'. Ken was, as he acknowledges, a 'reformist' who believed that the state could manage things better. Revolution was for people who had nothing to lose but their lives.

Earlier in his life – after leaving school – Ken had enquired about possible employment at London Zoo but there were no vacancies. He did, however, obtain employment as an apprentice animal technician at the Royal Marsden Hospital in West London. He preferred to work with animals rather than to join his father on a window-cleaning round.

In 1971, Ken was elected to the Lambeth Borough Council. It was the beginning of his distinguished record in local government. Within the Lambeth Labour Group there was a struggle for influence between left and right. Ken describes himself as an 'enthusiastic participant' in this struggle. He specialised in housing, and many working families had the benefit of his influence. Ken was elected vice-chair of the Housing Committee. John Major, later to become a Conservative Prime Minister, had been the chairman of the Lambeth Housing Committee. Ken speaks well of him and acknowledges that 'he had a reputation for innovation'. He also formed an admiration for Harold Wilson and Tony Crosland among the Labour leaders of the time.

Ken also pays tribute to Ron Haywood, former General Secretary of the Labour Party. From personal experience of working for a short time with Ron I can confirm Ken's opinion. Ron was always helpful to active members. He quotes Ron as saying: 'our problem wasn't reds under the bed but reactionaries in the cupboard'. Well said, Ron!

In 1973, Ken was elected to the newly created Greater London Council. He soon distinguished himself and within two or three years was being considered by some of his colleagues as a possible future leader. He was eventually elected leader when he was only 35 years of age. Changes were made to show that there was a 'new broom'. Among them was the abolition

of the leader's chauffeur-driven car. Ken travelled by Tube. Numerous other changes were proposed to stimulate employment and to cut the price of school meals. There was legal resistance to some of the proposed changes. At one period during his leadership Ken was doing about 300 public meetings a year. Under his leadership improvements were made to the transport system, crime and anti-social behaviour were tackled vigorously, employment was promoted and racial toleration was encouraged.

Within the top leadership of the Conservative Party – notably Mrs Thatcher – there was strong opposition to the policies of the GLC and of its leader. This opposition culminated in the legal abolition of the GLC. This took place at the end of March 1986. After Labour's defeat in the 1983 General Election, the Conservatives had a comfortable majority in Parliament. Nevertheless opinion polls still showed that a majority of Londoners were against the abolition of the GLC.

One important reason why Ken Livingstone decided eventually to accept nomination for a Parliamentary seat was his conviction, based upon experience, that local authority powers and authority were being diminished. Interestingly, in the selection process of the Labour candidate for Hampstead in 1979, where Ken was selected, his opponent was Vince Cable, who later became a Liberal Democrat and is now in the Coalition Government.

There is much else in the life of Ken Livingstone deserving of inclusion in a book review. He has been a Member of Parliament (for Brent East), the Mayor of London, and he has been prominent in the Labour Party not only in London but also at national level. He is far from finished. Later this year he will again be Labour's candidate for the office of Mayor in the capital city.

Space forbids doing justice to the full contribution made by Ken Livingstone. However, it is worthy of special note that Ken is generous in his tribute to the many colleagues who have encouraged him and helped him at different stages in his life. Redmond O'Neill and John Ross are not household names but they both rendered outstanding service. I was pleased also to read kindly references to Ted Knight, the former leader of the Labour Group on Lambeth Council. Ted, as I know from trade union experience, has many attributes.

This is a book that deserves to be widely read.

*Jim Mortimer*