

# Reviews

## Decline

**Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Basic Books 2012, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 9780465029549, £17.99**

The ideas and suggestions offered by Zbigniew Brzezinski (President Carter's National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981) in his latest book are organized in four parts: 'The Receding West'; 'The Waning of the American Dream'; 'The World After America: By 2025, not Chinese but Chaotic'; 'Beyond 2025: A New Geopolitical Balance'. A brief 7-page Introduction and a 10-page Conclusion, entitled 'America's Dual Role', bring the total number of pages of the main text (excluding notes, contents, etc) to 194 pages.

Part I, 'The Receding West', offers a realistic presentation of the current global power balance, and outlines the novel socio-economic factors which currently disturb this balance. In addition to impressive economic growth in East Asia, the impact of the 'worldwide political awakening' is underlined:

'The ongoing dispersal of global power is furthered by the emergence of a volatile phenomenon: the worldwide political awakening of populations until recently politically passive or repressed ... this awakening is the cumulative product of an interactive and interdependent world connected by instant visual communications and of the demographic youth bulge in the less advanced societies composed of the easy-to-mobilize and politically restless university students and the socially deprived unemployed. Both groups resent the richer portions of humanity and the privileged corruption of their rulers. That resentment of authority and privilege is unleashing populist passions with unprecedented potential for generating large-scale turmoil.' And, 'The recent emergence of global television, and then of the Internet, has in turn connected previously isolated populations with the world at large ...'

In Part Two, 'The Waning of the America Dream', Brzezinski offers a sharp analysis of the reasons why the United States has wasted, in such a brief period of time, its post-Cold War 'uni-polar moment'. For the disinterested student of history, this may be the most valuable part of *Strategic Vision*. Brzezinski's critique of the Bush II policies is scathing, as is his more general critique of the failings of the US ruling class, becoming especially loud as we reach the financiers' quarters. One can discern here the dedicated 'imperial general' enraged by the excesses and

pettiness of ‘the officer corps’ of a socio-economic system he defended for decades. Yet, decades after the end of the Cold War, Bzrezinski seems not to have detected the tendency of unbridled capitalism/neo-liberalism to generate worldwide systemic mayhem.

For example, Bzrezinski trenchantly enumerates the basic flaws of the US system:

‘Six critical dimensions stand out as ... increasingly threatening liabilities: First is America’s mounting and eventually unsustainable national debt ... Second, America’s flawed financial system is a major liability (Congressional irresponsibility regarding deregulation ... greedy Wall Street speculators ... economic hardship on millions ...) Third, widening income inequality coupled with stagnating social mobility is a long term danger to social consensus and democratic stability ... Fourth is its decaying national infrastructure ... Fifth ... a public that is highly ignorant about the world. The sixth liability, related to the fifth, is America’s gridlocked and highly partisan system ...’ (p46)

But then, when he is comparing the United States to the European model (‘seen by many as socially more just than the American model’), Bzrezinski writes: ‘In particular, the Greek and later the Irish debt crises of 2010 and their contagion effects suggested that the *paternalism* and *social generosity* (our italics) of the European economic system are potentially unsustainable and could even threaten Europe’s financial solvency, a realization taken to heart by the conservative leadership in the UK, leading to austerity measures forcing dramatic cuts in social welfare programs.’

The reader is left at a loss. How could one make an earnest critique of the US economic system, and the inequalities it generates, and yet still believe that *the current* European economic system is ‘paternalistic and socially generous’?

Part Three, entitled ‘The World After America’, starts with the words:

‘If America falters ... no single power will be ready by then to exercise the role that the world, upon the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, expected the United States to play ... What follows analyses the implications of that historically ominous – though certainly not predetermined – “if”.’

In addition to extensive analysis regarding China’s (lack of) capacity, and intention to replace the US as a global ‘hyper-power’, this part of the book lists what the author calls ‘The Geopolitically Most Endangered States’: Georgia, Taiwan, South Korea, Belarus, Ukraine, Afghanistan (‘the French question’ – *was it worth it?*- comes to mind), Pakistan, Israel (and the Middle East).

We cannot but observe that some countries of Eastern Europe, described

in Brzezinski's earlier book, *The Grand Chessboard*, as 'pivotal states', are now being included in this 'endangered species' list. Belarus is listed because it 'remains politically and economically dependent on Russia'. The author notes that 'a majority of Belarus's 9.6 million people speak Russian, Belarus as a national state has been independent only since 1991, and the depth of the people's national identity has not been tested'; therefore, Belarus risks losing its independence. And here arises a question: what if the Belarussians consider themselves Russian, as many Ukrainians do, in a similar way to Lancastrians or Yorkshire folk considering themselves English? Is there a chance they feel more 'endangered' as things are now than if they joined Russia and others in a 'Eurasian Union'?

Regarding Ukraine, the most pivotal of the 'pivotal states' in *The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski writes:

'... a passive European response to the absorption of Belarus, not to mention an earlier and successful use of force to intimidate Georgia, could entice the Russian leaders to attempt at some point a more overt reunification. But it would be a very complicated undertaking, perhaps requiring the use of some force and at least a contrived economic crisis within Ukraine to make a formal union with an economically more resilient Russia more palatable to the Ukrainians.'

It does not seem to cross the author's mind that such a union might eventually require just 'a free and fair election'<sup>1</sup>.

Part IV, 'Beyond 2025: A New Geopolitical Balance', the longest of the four parts, offers suggestions as to how a declining – but not imploding – America could contribute to the long-term stability of the world. It starts:

'America's global standing in the decades ahead will depend on its successful implementation of purposeful efforts to overcome its drift toward a socio-economic obsolescence and to shape a new and stable geopolitical equilibrium on the world's most important continent by far, Eurasia. The key to America's future is thus in the hands of the American people ...'

Then comes the strategic vision; 'not a blueprint but a vision', as Brzezinski makes clear in the book and elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. The US mission should be two-pronged: (a) to deliberately create a 'Larger and Vital West' by incorporating Turkey and Russia in it, and (b) to play the role of 'offshore balancer', but also 'conciliator', in the affairs of East Asia<sup>3</sup>, while avoiding military involvement in any conflicts in Asia, except if bound by existing treaties, as in the case of Japan and South Korea. However, regarding task (a), one could observe that Turkey envisages itself as 'the bridge' between East and West,

and it is thus not as keen as a decade ago to be fully integrated in the West. (Given the state of the European Union nowadays, who could blame the Turks?) Even if, after overriding Franco-German reservations, a rapid EU accession was offered to Turkey, one wonders how attractive this prospect would seem now. Also, a caveat is attached to the ‘offer’ to Russia to become an integral part of a ‘Larger West’: Brzezinski insists that Russia should first ‘democratize’ itself, and this process is understood as an élite ‘revolt’ against Putin. This caveat could be taken as a sign that the author’s chronic Russophobia has mutated to acute Putin-phobia<sup>4</sup>. Since Brzezinski notes later in his analysis (p153) that ‘getting there’ (i.e. incorporating Russia and Turkey in a larger West) ‘will take time, perseverance, and – in the more complicated and thus more difficult case of Russia – coolheaded realism’, it is worth recalling Dr. Kissinger’s recent suggestion about how to perceive Putin’s motives, and how to deal with him:

‘He [Putin] is, above all, a Russian patriot who feels humiliated by the experience of the ’90s, which were in the most formative period of his career. He is not anti-Western. When I first met him, he was very anxious to have a kind of strategic partnership with the United States. He is very resentful of what he interprets as intervention in Russian domestic affairs and even more, of course, in what he may interpret and does interpret as some American tendencies to support his political opponents in order to encourage his overthrow. But I believe that a dialogue is possible and that on specific issues he can turn out to be a constructive partner.’ (Henry Kissinger, 10-3-12, Fareed Zacharia’s *Global Public Square*).

The last sentence of Brzezinski’s book reads:

‘But, since America is not yet Rome and China is not yet its Byzantium, a stable global order ultimately depends on America’s ability to renew itself and to act wisely as the *promoter* and *guarantor* of a revitalized West and as the *balancer* and *conciliator* of a rising new East.’ (Emphasis added.)

*The Strategic Vision* is a deeper, less aggressive, and more mature work than *The Grand Chessboard*. It deals with China in a depth not found in the earlier work<sup>5</sup>. But, most of all, this new book deserves attention because it seems written by a mind in agony about the world’s future. In the last lines of the acknowledgements, the author expresses his appreciation of his spouse’s support: ‘... She was as relentless in her constructive critique as in her urging that I be *bold* (our italics) in advocating a *more promising* strategic vision of tomorrow than merely a continuation of what is today.’

*Theodore N. Iliadis, Greece*

## Zbig on Blair

‘That guy [Blair] is a lightweight ... I don’t like his political morals and how he’s been enriching himself since leaving office. He preaches high moral language but ... I have a visceral contempt for Blair. Not dislike. Just contempt.’

*Zbigniew Brzezinski, Financial Times, 15 January 2012*

### Notes

1. Incidentally, this expression ‘*a contrived economic crisis*’, uttered by a renowned international relations expert, is an eye-opener for Greeks, Spaniards, Irish and other austerity-stricken Europeans. One of the brightest western minds assures us that an economic crisis *could* conceivably be ‘contrived’ in order to achieve socio-political aims. But rest assured, gentle reader, such ‘complicated’ undertakings could be contemplated *only* by malevolent authoritarians such as *Vlad the Bad* Putin and his minions, scheming in the basements of the Kremlin against neighbouring free nations and their sovereignty, while our own enlightened democratic leaderships would never – ever! – entertain such ideas, *them* (Texas slang) not being guided by economic dogmas, nor by lust for unbridled power and profits ...
2. See Centre for Strategic and International Studies, book presentation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZp7NSkHIDE&feature=related>.
3. Compare to: ‘Russia has no hidden agendas in the region. Our state does not aim to forge covert military alliances that would threaten anyone’s security. On the contrary, we look forward to intensifying diversified multilateral economic and political cooperation with all the countries that show such a willingness.’ (From a recent Sergey Lavrov article in the Indonesian journal *Strategic Review* - [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/0783A1264F6F63FA442579D700525C04](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/0783A1264F6F63FA442579D700525C04))
4. There is only one plausible rational explanation for this Putin-phobia, reinforced by the fact that the acronym *BRICS* is nowhere to be found in *Strategic Vision* (NB: only one mention is made, on p. 110, of ‘the world’s emerging powers – China, India, Brazil and Russia’). Could it be that Brzezinski holds against Putin his pivotal role in creating and cementing the BRICS forum? Could it be that this forum is seen as a diplomatic ‘game-spoiler’ for the US, since its success would disrupt all plans to effectively ‘contain’ China by enlisting India as its permanent regional antagonist?
5. His perspective could be encapsulated in this characteristic line: ‘Prudence and patience are part of China’s imperial DNA. But China is also ambitious, proud, and conscious that its unique history is but a prologue to its destiny.’ (p.81)

## Afghanistan

**Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010*, Hurst & Company 2012, 538 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849041546, £30**

Initially commissioned as a study for New York University's Center on International Co-operation, *An Enemy We Created* becomes a *tour de force* in its own right, providing extensive research from the existing Western literature and Arabic and Pashtu translations, and most commendably, quality fieldwork consisting in firsthand accounts of the conflict's household names.

The book aims to decipher the relationship between two highly controversial and much examined organizations of our present times, Taliban and Al-Qaeda, taking into consideration their points of interaction, co-operation and conflict, while suggesting, not necessarily subtly, that this symbiosis is misconstrued by Western policymakers, and it is of a rather mythical nature.

The chronological flow of the research is welcome – starting from 1970, moving through the Soviet occupation and eventual demise, up to September 11 and the present day – while continuously drawing the intended parallel between the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As such, one can clearly follow the authors' thesis, whilst pinning it on the backdrop of Afghanistan's recent history.

What this study brings that is new is its analysis of the origin and ideological framework of each organization, starting from the Deobandist southern Afghan roots of the yet young Taliban, and from the Muslim Brotherhood influenced, though secular, roots of Al-Qaeda. Adding to the novelty, a large part of the book's discourse on Al-Qaeda and its involvement in the CIA sponsored mujahideen jihad against communism is based on the hypothesis that most Arab Afghans that volunteered after 1979 perceived Afghanistan as a launch pad for the radical movements in their native countries, an opportunity for practise in guerrilla warfare. Their mission did ultimately evolve into a jihad for the entire Muslim *umma*, seen as an extension of the crusades, and focused primarily on the American infidels that 'occupied' Saudi Arabia and Israel. It seems that, at no point in time, did the Arab jihadists concern themselves with the cause of Afghanistan, pre or post the Soviet invasion. This is to say, Taliban and Al-Qaeda, although fighting side by side and interacting for the purpose of

exchanging intelligence, had dissimilar goals all throughout, and did not co-operate at the level the Bush Administration implied that they had.

*An Enemy We Created* explores the Taliban's nationalist objectives in detail, observing that their main concern, after the Soviets had gone and the mujahideen had failed to establish peace, was to create an Islamic caliphate similar to the one in Prophet Mohammed's lifetime, to which purpose Mullah Mohammed Omar was named an Amir and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was formed. Through various interviews with former Taliban members, it becomes obvious that in the mid 1990s and long after, the Taliban did not have a coherent notion about the organizational structure of the new state or the essential public policies. Thus, since most Talibs had a religious upbringing, they deemed reasonable the administration of 'Islamic shari'a justice', together with its social policies towards women's restricted role in society. This, understandably, backfired and attracted a considerable amount of negative press, together with a refusal of international recognition of the Taliban government. Bewildered by what was seen as an obvious Western conspiracy against Afghanistan, the Taliban grew even further apart from the West by refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden, whom it had 'inherited' in 1996, when he was 'vanished' from Sudan.

A key to understanding accurately the relationship between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda is to understand the motivation behind the Afghan government's repeated disregard of requests from the US to turn in bin Laden and his executives. The book's wide-ranging interviews with people close to Mullah Mohammad Omar seem to suggest that there was no close relationship between the two leaders, but that Omar refused to hand over bin Laden because it went against Islamic principles; a Muslim cannot betray another Muslim and leave him in the hands of the infidels, which in this case incorporated the United States as well as the Saud regime. While Omar had his hands tied, 'He is like a bone stuck in my throat, I can't swallow it nor can I get it out' (p 166), bin Laden planned for September 11. In the aftermath of the attack, Omar still refused to speak against bin Laden, but did not defend him either, since his whereabouts were unknown even to the Taliban. By that time, Bush had come to speak against both organizations as if they were one, and much of the world soon seemed to stand behind him. The Taliban saw its demise before the year was over, and has been struggling for the past decade to regain control of Afghanistan and to set itself apart from Al-Qaeda.

*An Enemy We Created* skillfully does what it was intended to do, which is to challenge the apparent similarity between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

However, it does not fall short in foreseeing a change of views from the re-branded, renewed Taliban concerning their relationship with Al-Qaeda due to the capture-or-kill tactics applied indiscriminately by General Petraeus to members of both organizations. In the last chapter and the conclusion, we can observe a hindsight understanding of the American policies applied in Afghanistan in the past decade and their toxic consequences: a corrupt, impotent Karzai government, an ousted, on-the-run but still resourceful Taliban, and a divided, disillusioned population stricken by poverty, local warfare and impending fratricide.

The advice given by Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn is plain and alarming: with the United States seemingly backing out of Afghanistan, remaining foreign powers need to start talking now, at all levels, with ordinary Afghans of various ethnicities, village mullahs, government officials and insurgents alike. While talks are taking place, we should also prepare for the possibility of a new civil war.

While the book lacks an intricate post-bin Laden analysis (probably due to difficulties in obtaining interviews so close to the death of Al-Qaeda's founder), it makes up for it in providing a close examination of other interested parties, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states. The *Definitions* and *Biographies* sections, aside from the usual *Notes*, *Index* and *Bibliography* are interesting, insightful and useful to readers who might not be in tune with Islamic and Afghan lingo.

With poignant, exhaustive accounts of Taliban and Al-Qaeda affiliates, *An Enemy We Created* is a must-read; technical but rich, deserving its own place in every student of Afghanistan's bibliography.

*Lucia Papureanu*

## To begin the world over again

**John Nichols, *Uprising: How Wisconsin renewed the politics of protest, from Madison to Wall Street*, 192 pages, Avalon Publishing Group, paperback ISBN 9781568587035, £10.99**

If there is one clear message from the US in this book for British readers, it is that Ed Miliband, who owes his position as UK Labour leader to the votes of the Unions, should be proud of that heritage, extol it, not just as the defenders of organised labour, but as the historic upholders of the rights and living conditions of all our people. What the present Coalition Government is doing in the UK follows exactly the measures already being pursued in

the US; the destruction of all those rights and benefits won over the years by Labour – a national health service, comprehensive schooling, education, training or employment for young people, care for the elderly and infirm – all this being put in jeopardy in the interests of a tiny minority of the super-rich, who have used their wealth to control the press, corrupt the police, and thus influence electoral procedures and election results.

James Madison, one of the founders of the US constitution and inspirer and architect of its Bill of Rights, in whose name the capital of Wisconsin was constructed, warned always against the dangers of an elected despotism. Democracy does not end on election day; it depends at all times, Madison argued, on the close involvement of the people, and historically it has been Labour organisations which have assured this, both in the UK and the USA. Appeal to that past history, John Nicholls here argues, is a potent force for belief in the possibility of change in the future.

What, however, this book also shows is that resistance is now possible; things can be changed. ‘We have it in our power,’ in the words of Tom Paine, quoted again and again at the Madison Capitol occupation, ‘to begin the world over again’. It may seem a bit much to say that one occupation of a US city Capitol, albeit over several days by 125,000 men and women, teachers, local government workers, small businessmen, farmers, retirees, even policemen and firemen, could begin to change the world. When I reviewed the first book written on the Madison occupation, *We are Wisconsin*, I ended by quoting the cautious words of the book’s editor: ‘this collection captures a moment in time that is part of a longer story that has only begun’ (*Spokesman 115*).

This was written in 2011. By 2012, John Nichols, whose family has lived in Wisconsin for several generations, and is *The Nation’s* Washington correspondent, was able in a new book to show how far within just over a year the story had unfolded. Occupations had been effected by thousands of protesters at almost all city Capitols in the US and there was a major occupation at Wall Street in New York. Nichols establishes without doubt that Wisconsin and Occupy Wall Street, as the blurb to the book announces, ‘inspired a nation and transformed the political debate ... at a time when public services were under assault from corporate privatisers and billionaire political donors’. You can say that again for the UK today.

The most important part of John Nichols’ story is about the way in which the US news media, which had persistently derided the influence of labour and neglected the strength of the protest movements, was drowned out by the blogs and tweets and Facebooks of the masses. Those sceptics who deny the importance of the new information technology, claiming only that the rich corporate owners of the systems use them to expose

individuals' wilder words, simply underestimate the power of the 'Next Media' to challenge the old corporate-owned and controlled media of television news and newspapers. You need only notice how desperately the Chinese authorities act to ban these sources of alternative information to the official line. In the UK the Murdoch Press has been exposed for its phone hacking activities, but terrible as the stories are of the misery caused to individuals by this interference in their personal lives, these stories have tended to conceal the greater evil in the British news media of the unending denigration of the trade unions and of the assault on people's rights, by rehearsing tales of a tiny minority who abuse the benefit system.

In summing up the results of the Madison occupation, Nichols has to conclude that, however impressive the wider influence was in other cities in the US, the direct success in Wisconsin was only a very limited one. Two Republican senators were replaced by Democrats, making the party balance more equal, but not unseating the Republican majority, on which Governor Walker depended. Walker was not brought before the courts for exceeding his powers, and though Nichols himself was involved in discussion of a state wide strike of workers against the Walker plan to reduce their rights, the idea of a general strike was rejected as being likely to provoke more opposition than support. The power of the corporate controlled media was still seen as a formidable obstacle to any real challenge to corporate wealth and power, a fact most clearly recognised by President Obama, who avoided any visit to Wisconsin in 2011.

Once again, what lessons can be drawn for the comparable power and wealth balance in the UK? There is not the two-party system, as in the US; each party financed by enormous resources of immensely rich corporations which can determine policies in their own interests. But the power of the media of press and television in the UK, controlled by the Murdoch and other empires, places severe limits on what protesters seeking major changes in Government policies can effect. The Trade Union movement is undoubtedly stronger in the UK than in the US, especially in the public sector and in the North of England, but it has been equally reduced in power and numbers by the collapse of manufacturing and mining industries.

When divisions can be overcome, as they were in March 2012 by the victorious Respect candidate, George Galloway, in Bradford West, a previously safe Labour seat, victory can be overwhelming. Ed Miliband was right to go to Bradford to learn the lessons that it was teaching on the need to resist Coalition Government policies firmly and totally, taking into account especially the minority votes of women and Muslims. All those who have worked all their lives for a community based Labour movement

in the UK will agree that it is profoundly to be hoped that Ed Miliband has learnt the lessons from his visit, and will embark henceforth on a more dynamic course for Labour in the lead up to the next General Election. But they will need to remember the key message of the electoral struggles in the US, that democracy does not end on election day. The lesson of Wisconsin is that we, the people, have all the time to be speaking truth to power.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## **Tonypandy and beyond**

**Dai Smith, *In the Frame: Memory in Society 1910-2010*, Parthian Books 2010, 446 pages plus photographs, hardback ISBN 9781906998226, £20**

The author, Dai Smith, is a historian, formerly Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Glamorgan, now Chairperson of the Arts Council for Wales, and first holder of the Chair in Cultural History at Swansea University. He is a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales. He describes *In the Frame* as a personal 'alternative' (meaning 'extra') cultural history of Wales in the century 1910-2010. His other credentials are his choice of subjects for biographies, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (1993), and *Raymond Williams – A Warrior's Tale* (2008).

The author's choice of the century beginning 1910 is not only because it ends in the year of publication of the book. 1910 was the date of the strike of miners of the Cambrian Combine collieries which led to the involvement of the police and the military and the Tonypandy riot. The book's cover and inside illustrations include a photograph of hundreds of those miners calmly attending a strike meeting. The strike was to last a year. The author was intrigued to find that his grandfather, Dai Owen, then 21 years old, a former slate quarry worker from Blaenau Ffestiniog, was easily recognisable in the photograph.

The author's other connection with the Rhondda Valley and Tonypandy is that he was born and spent his childhood there. The book ends with an account of changes to the Rhondda Valley after the closures of most the coal mines that had created industrial South Wales. In between, Welsh culture, without much emphasis on Welsh language, is discussed in terms of many personalities involved in painting, photography, poetry, novels, music, history, politics and sport. My fifty years as a resident, even my adoption as Welsh by Act of Parliament in 1974, does not qualify me to

comment on a cultural history of Wales, but I can well imagine that this is a book that will be valued particularly by the émigré Welsh whose *hiraeth* (yearning) remains unfulfilled.

I was surprised by the space and the enthusiasm given by the author to boxing. He acknowledges the earlier authors whose work allows him to describe contests which took place before he was born, round by round and sometimes blow by blow. A chapter is devoted to Tommy Farr, ‘The Tonypandy Kid’, whose survival for 15 rounds against the world heavyweight champion, Joe Louis, in 1937 in New York, is attributed to his boyhood experience of ‘boxing in the holes’. He was a ‘collier boy’ at the age of 13, working as an assistant to a collier at a coal face at the Cambrian colliery – another experience ranking as child abuse.

The author does not describe ‘boxing in the holes’ as child abuse but from the descriptions there can be little doubt. Holes were dug in the ground about a foot apart to the depth of a fighter’s waist and the boys punched each other until they were virtually unconscious. Tommy Farr described such fights as ‘the hardest I ever had. It taught you to parry, to duck and above all to take it. It may not have been a proper school but it did establish your courage. If you were good in the holes you were good anywhere.’

Losing consciousness as a result of injury in employment is now categorised as ‘major injury’ reportable to the Health and Safety Executive for the good reason that injury to the brain can be permanent, even fatal. That it can be the *objective* of a ‘sport’ has always amazed me. Our current prime minister has described the health and safety culture as a ‘monster’ and has resolved to ‘kill it off for good’ this year. Such things remain to be resolved and perhaps this book will help people to know where we have come from. Joe Louis was surprised to see the scars on Tommy Farr’s body, some caused by a mine explosion before he was 16 years old.

*Christopher Gifford*

## **Towards a recognised Northern Region**

**Paul Salvesson, MBE, *Socialism with a Northern Accent: Radical Traditions for Modern Times*, 224 pages, Lawrence & Wishart 2011, paperback ISBN 9781907103391, £14.99**

This book by a railwayman, who is a visiting professor at the University of Huddersfield, presents an unanswerable case for a Northern Region in

a regional United Kingdom. Though this is not the central message of the book, it is formally proposed in the last sentence. The book is a celebration of a Northern English culture and a community tradition that is not yet dead, despite the Northern counties loss of their historic mining and manufacturing industries.

While the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government is busy destroying all the quite minimal measures taken by Labour Governments to build Regional Development Agencies and Government Regional Offices, the people of Bradford, the very heart of the Northern region, did something remarkable. They voted in a recent by-election, overwhelmingly, for a notable agitator, George Galloway, representing the 'Respect Party', who appealed to the women, the ethnic Muslim communities, and the Yorkshire folk, especially among the youth, facing unemployment, and simply massacred the Labour and Lib Dem establishment. Ed Miliband felt the need to go to Bradford to find out what had happened in the elimination of a 'safe' Labour seat. This event took place after Salvesson's book was written, but it can only be hoped that Miliband will follow Salvesson's advice, that the Labour Party should set up pilot 'regional commissions', which are genuinely representative of each region concerned.

Salvesson's book is a rich source of information, culled from exceptionally wide reading of Northern writings and celebrating the full texts in appendices of 'The Socialist Ten Commandments' from the Independent Labour Party, the poem 'England Arise' by Edward Carpenter, and Allen Clarke/Teddy Ashton's 'A Gradely Prayer'. Individual heroes and, equally, in fact mainly, heroines, of Northern Labour are given special inserted pages in the main text. Examples are Edward Carpenter of Derbyshire, Michael Davitt of Ireland and Rossendale, Robert Blatchford of Halifax, Hannah Mitchell of Manchester, Margaret and Rachel MacMillan, who moved from the US via Scotland to Bradford and then London, to be close associates of Keir Hardie, Catherine Bruce Glasier, who came from Dorset to Chapel-en-le-Frith, and helped to found the Independent Labour Party (ILP). It is a strange publisher's quirk that these inserts are not given page numbers and often not referred to in the Index.

Indeed, it is a most unfortunate lack in the book, the absence of a comprehensive Index. It is probably the worst Index that I have ever encountered. In the end, I had to write in my own entries of names and subjects and extra page entries in altogether over fifty places, with often several pages of separate references from the inserts. Examples of missing items in the Index include events such as the Spanish Civil War, countries

and counties, most particularly Wales and South Yorkshire, groups such as Ethnic Minorities and Voluntary Societies, institutions such as the Mechanics Institutes, Dame Schools and Ruskin College (the Northern College is not mentioned, despite its name and position), politicians such as Ken Livingstone and a host of important authors, who are quoted often several times in the text, but not in the Index, including Sheila Rowbotham, Royden Harrison, Raymond Williams, Sydney Pollard, Huw Beynon, Antonio Gramsci, Fenner Brockway, Walter Greenwood, and Stephen Yeo.

This absence of editorial support for Salveson is a real shame, because the book is a rich mine of resources for understanding the emergence over two centuries in the half dozen Northern counties of England, of many of the community support systems that have made life tolerable, and even enjoyable for those who one may call, without patronising, ‘ordinary folk’. It is not just to be found in the organisation of trade unions, which have always been more than just special interest groups, and the development of socialist principles,

### **A Gradely Prayer**

Give us, Lord, a bit o’ sun,  
 A bit o’ wark, an’ a bit o’ fun.  
 Give us aw in th’ struggle an’ splutter,  
 Eaur daily bread – an’ a bit o’ butter.

Give us health, eaur keep to make,  
 An’ a bit to spare for poor folk’s sake;  
 Give us sense, for we’re some of us duffers,  
 An’ a heart to feel for them that suffers.

Give us, too, a bit of a song,  
 An’ a tale an’ a book to help us along;  
 An’ give us eaur share o’ sorrow’s lesson  
 That we may prove heaw grief’s a blessin’.

Give us, Lord, a chance to be  
 Eaur gradely best, brave, wise, an’ free;  
 Eaur gradely best for eaurselfs an’ others,  
 Till all men larn to live as brothers.

*By Charles Allen Clarke (Teddy Ashton)*  
*‘Gradely’ means ‘very good’, as in ‘aye, gradely’,*  
*according to BBC Lancashire.*

which have in the ILP and the Labour Party itself always comprised an ‘ethical’ faith, distinct from the secular convictions of Marxist Communism. In very practical terms we can find in these Northern movements the real strength of local government as the basis of national government – the origins of the Co-operatives in the Rochdale Pioneers, the first Chartists’ demand for universal suffrage, the Clarion Cycle Clubs, the earliest children’s clinics and nursery schools, the Socialist Sunday Schools, and the widest spread of Workers’ Education, as well as pit banners and brass bands.

It is to rescue this great radical tradition as an inspiration for modern times, to challenge privilege and corporate wealth and finance, that Salvesson has written this book, in the belief that, in Maurice Glasman’s words in the book’s blurb, ‘Labour can renew itself as a national party with roots in working communities throughout the country’. This is echoed in the book’s Foreword, contributed by John Prescott, where he appeals for recognition of the need, in the face of climate change and of the global economic financial crisis, for the Labour Party to join with the broad alliance, revealed in the Bradford victory of the ‘Respect Party’; and with this alliance to re-establish the role not of the centralist state of corporate power or of an unaccountable Party, but the ‘enabling state’, built on local communities, which was the great discovery of our Labour forebears.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

### **‘Democracy cannot rule an empire’**

**Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Politics: Antiquity and its Legacy*, I.B. Tauris, 390 pages, paperback ISBN 9781845118457, 14.99**

This is best read with Professor Vlassopoulos’ earlier publications, *Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History Beyond Eurocentrism* (2007) plus a flow of cognate articles – full bibliography on his website. Forthcoming are *Greeks and Barbarians* and (as joint-editor) *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slavery* where I wonder if account will be taken of Marxist George Thomson’s claim (*The First Philosophers*, 1955) that ‘such a study will never be undertaken by bourgeois scholars, whose acquiescence in colonial oppression renders them incapable of understanding the degradation either of the slave or still more of the slave-owner’.

Four chapters, flanked by Introduction and Epilogue: Who Should Rule? The Exercise of Power; Liberty. Politics as Activity; Participation, Deliberation, Conflict. The Ends of Politics; The Good Life, a Better World.

Vlassopoulos' overriding theme is that the Renaissance (where his definition of 'modern' begins) rediscovery of classical texts inspired re-application of ancient political theories. Not, of course, a novel approach. The author acknowledges Marx' anticipation. And, much of what Vlassopoulos says about America was scooped by Loren J. Samons' *What's Wrong with Democracy? From Athenian Practice to American Worship* (2004), along with Mogens Herman Hansen's hefty review-article in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (2006.01.32, online) – neither is cited.

'Continuity' is (rightly) Vlassopoulos' watchword, thereby following Marx' third 1856 *Free Press* article on 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Diplomatic History: 'To understand a limited historical epoch, we must step beyond its limits, and compare it with other historical epochs'.

Despite these prefatory genuflections, Marx rarely features until a concluding stab at explaining his 'refusal' to blueprint his ideal society that ignores the scatter of futuristic descriptions throughout his works collected in Bertell Ollman's studies and Marx' intention to do this in the final volume of *Capital*.

The Introduction sets out Vlassopoulos' many stalls. Apropos of the 'battleground' over Plato, no mention of Gilbert Ryle's controversial notion (*Plato's Progress*, 1966) that he was banned from teaching in Athens. On the ancient and anti-Mussolini 'Aventine Successions', note Marx' scorn (*Capital*) of Menenius' 'absurd fable' of Belly and Members that settled the former. Vlassopoulos exaggerates the decline of Roman influence: look, for example, from Marx' and Samuel Johnson's schoolboy Latin essays to the imperial lay-out of Washington, D.C. Plutarch's *Lives* were never 'out of the canon'; Churchill told his wartime officers to read them. Vlassopoulos' 'the purpose of history was to teach by example' is both an unacknowledged and distorted version of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' original aphorism.

Vlassopoulos' four interconnected chapters allow similar qualifications. Tyrants are mentioned without distinguishing Greek and English preconceptions – they often had popular support. The anonymous 'Old Oligarch' was rabidly anti-democratic, as many Athenian sources (even that notable exception, Herodotus, said it was easier to deceive a crowd than an individual), albeit the extent of this is now debated; cf. Hansen (above). Aristotle deemed law-courts the lynchpin of democracy before 'some modern scholars'. Roman innovations of plebiscite and secret ballot deserved mention. Not just Greeks discussed the Roman polity: what about Cicero and Seneca? Machiavelli (who bulks large in Vlassopoulos after

Rousseau) was not the first to adduce Polybius' Book 6 on political institutions; it was already well-known in Florence. As to the 'notorious' *Prince*, Vlassopoulos ignores the widespread (from Rousseau to Leo Strauss) view that it is a satire and Antonio Gramsci's intriguing idea that it was addressed less to rulers than ruled.

There is much here on the American and French Revolutions. Marx dubbed the latter 'bourgeois'. Asked about its influence, Zhou Enlai riposted 'Too soon to tell'. American and other nomenclature is pertinent: Republicans versus Democrats; 'People's Republic' and 'People's Democracy' – the difference? With its system of 'Propositions' (local plebiscites on both material and moral issues) and voting for, for example, judges and sheriffs, within a blatantly plutocratic society, America is the ultimate 'Mixed Constitution'.

Vlassopoulos raises the Second Amendment (Right to Bear Arms) without contrasting the Athenian ban and the Roman *Digest's* legal opinion that carrying weapons does not imply violent intent – the National Rifle Association's propaganda.

Orwell (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, 1941) called the English electoral system 'an all but open fraud yet not completely corrupt,' also trying to reconcile socialism with patriotism, latterly followed in Billy Bragg's *The Progressive Patriot* (2006). Athenian Democracy had many merits. The sovereign Assembly did not vote itself 'unsustainable' privileges. *Parrhesia* (Freedom of Speech) was its watchword. It was capable of admitting and correcting wrong decisions. Accountability was everything – Vlassopoulos wryly reflects it would have tried and punished Blair and Bush for their Iraq war crime. Contrariwise, Socrates was not the only one prosecuted for the 'wrong' religious opinions, whilst (so Thucydides – frequent here) the Assembly was infected by a fatal *pothos* (desire) to invade Sicily, thus disproving the modern cliché that free countries do not attack each other. As the demagogue (an Athenian word and genre, strangely downplayed by Vlassopoulos) Cleon proclaimed, 'Democracy cannot rule an empire'.

Montesquieu's absurd depreciation of Roman culture goes unchallenged. Vlassopoulos' 'negative liberty' concept is modernly offset by Marcuse's 'repressive tolerance'. Not all think Sparta's founding father Lycurgus legendary. The *Boule's* (Council) influence is undervalued – we know how agenda are manipulated. Early Roman literary texts can be mined for political pointers. Much more could/should have been said on debt and land redistribution, two chief ancient revolutionary slogans – debt cancellations by Solon and Agis far outdid contemporary Greek 'haircuts'.

Errors/typos: Publius was not the first Roman consul. Athenians did not

freely vote out their own democracy – armed thugs intimidated them. Spartan boys were institutionalised at 7, not 8. Robespierre’s first name was not Maximilienne. Livy’s ‘much-quoted passage’ (p. 48 + n. 22) is wrongly referenced (2. 1. 1, NOT 1. 2. 1). Talking of which, why not more direct primary source quotations? Of *circa* 400 footnotes, only c. 40 have them.

No bibliography. Vlassopoulos’ impressively wide reading is obvious. Odd omissions, though. On such ‘big-ticket’ items as Mixed Constitution and Representative Government, why not direct readers to the full-scale discussions by (respectively) K. von Fritz (1954) and J. A. O. Larsen (1955)?

The author’s style is occasionally un-idiomatic (‘to all means and extents,’ p. 1), repetitive, sometimes a bit cat-sat-on-the-mat, but blessedly uncluttered by academic Newspeak. Meaty in facts, spiced with provocations, this book (from Nottingham, my own *alma mater*) is, overall, a welcome addition to a useful series.

*Barry Baldwin*

## Free Ocalan

**Abdullah Ocalan, *Prison Writings III: The Road Map to Negotiations*, published by International Initiative, PO Box 100511, Cologne, Germany, paperback ISBN 9783941012431, £8.50**

Since February 1999, when he was arrested by Kenyan police in Nairobi, Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which began an armed struggle for Kurdish independence in eastern Turkey in 1984, has been held as a prisoner on Imrali Island in the Sea of Marmora. During this time he has written a number of books, three of which have been translated and published in English and other languages.

The first of these, *The Roots of Civilisation*, deals with the origins of human civilisation in Mesopotamia, now Iraq (see *Spokesman* 95). It argues that the ruling class creates a mythology or religion which gives divine sanction to its privileges, and this is instilled into the consciousness of subordinate classes. The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, formulated a similar theory and argued that a ruling class holds on to power not by force of arms alone but by establishing an ideological hegemony over society.

Ocalan’s second published book, *The PKK and the Kurdish Question*, postulates the theory that the Kurds are descendants of the original Neolithic population of the Gulf region and, despite conquest by Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Mongols and Turks in turn, have retained an originally

Indo-European language, Kurdish, and their traditional heritage (see *Spokesman 113*). Kurdish nationalism, he says, did not develop, even in the nineteenth century, because modern capitalist production – the creator of nationalist movements – did not develop in Kurdish territories.

He then looks at the struggle pursued by the PKK from its formation in 1978 and calls for the transformation of its policies. He comes out against the idea of an independent Kurdish national state and the continuation of the armed struggle. Not only does he condemn the Turkish state for its unbridled violence against the Kurds, but also the murderous tactics adopted by gangs associated with the PKK. His argument is that the PKK leaders must totally change their approach and work to establish a peaceful dialogue designed to achieve a democratic state providing full civil rights for Turks, Kurds and other national groups alike.

In 2009, the Turkish Government, through its national intelligence agency, MIT, made a secret approach to Ocalan, and a delegation led by Hakan Fidan carried on talks with him to 2011. Ocalan produced his proposals in the form of his *Road Map to Negotiations*, which has now been published as his third book.

*The Road Map* sets out Ocalan's proposals for the achievement of a peace settlement and resolution of the Kurdish problem. He argues that when the modern Turkish Republic came into existence, in the early twentieth century, the driving force was Turkish nationalism based on the new bourgeoisie and the state bureaucracy. The nationalist bureaucratic oligarchy wanted Turkey to be rid of its non-Turkish population and implemented a process of ethnic cleansing directed against Greeks and Armenians. Despite the fact that the Kurds worked with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to found the new Turkish state after defeat in the First World War, the state turned against them in subsequent years and refused to recognise their rights.

Ocalan says the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians and Jews have all encountered serious problems as a result of seeking to establish their national independence, and they should be looking for a different way forward within democratic, multi-ethnic, multilingual, multicultural, multi-faith states. Turkey should seek a solution to its Kurdish problem by preparing to transform itself into such a state.

Ocalan speaks of forming a union of communities (KCK) which could act as an umbrella organisation for the democratisation of civil society. He then puts forward a plan for action in three initial phases.

In the first phase, the PKK would declare a permanent no action period and the Turkish state and the PKK would take careful steps to avoid being provoked into action.

Secondly, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be established by the Turkish Government and approved by the Grand National Assembly. This Commission would make a series of legal proposals, including an amnesty, to be approved by the Grand National Assembly, following which the PKK would withdraw and disarm under the supervision of the US, the European Union, the UN, and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government.

In the third phase, constitutional steps to democratise the system would be instituted and PKK members could return home. The PKK would have no further need to engage in activities within Turkey.

Ocalan says that he should be released and enabled to assist the Kurds to move towards a democratic solution. He calls upon the Turkish Government and the Grand National Assembly to accept this Road Map and seek to achieve its implementation.

Sadly, the talks between Ocalan and Turkish Government representatives broke down in mid 2011, after parliamentary elections gave a third term to the AKP government led by Tayyip Erdogan. Instead of pursuing the possibility of an agreement, the government launched a full scale military offensive designed to crush the PKK and arrested large numbers of presumed sympathisers, particularly members and supporters of the pro Kurdish party, the BDP. Ocalan's lawyers have been prevented from visiting him and 36 of them have been arrested themselves.

This is a crushing blow to any hope of a peaceful settlement. Any Turkish government should recognise, by now, that the problem will not go away, even if temporarily suppressed, in part by military force and persecution. Ocalan's Road Map offered, and could still offer, a way forward.

As Ocalan makes clear, the western powers – above all the United States, in recent years – have never been prepared to favour a solution to the Kurdish problem. As long as Turkey was, and is, prepared to act as a bulwark for NATO, the West has been prepared to condemn the PKK as a terrorist organisation and ignore the Kurdish issue.

In the past, it was possible to condemn PKK outrages and turn a blind eye to the repressive policies of the Turkish Government, but now that Ocalan is prepared to talk in terms of a peaceful settlement it is a tragedy not to take him at his word and explore the possibilities of a permanent settlement. That is what was done by the British state in reference to Northern Ireland. The proposals being put forward do not involve any surrender of territory or acceptance of a federal solution. They would involve providing Kurds with full rights to speak their own language and be educated in it, to develop their culture and pursue their own customs. Turkey would merely be extending multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-

faith rights to its inhabitants, which should prevail in any genuine democracy. The time has come when all democrats should support the cause of Kurdish rights and speak out strongly in favour of them being established in Turkey and their other homelands.

*Stan Newens*

*With grateful acknowledgements to Liberation*

## Death in Mexico

**Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, MIT Press, Semiotexte(e)/Intervention Series, 2012, 136 pages, paperback ISBN 9781584351108, £9.95**

There rarely comes a book that exposes current events in such a clear-cut, shocking, yet sensibly realistic manner; *The Femicide Machine* does a splendid job at that. Sergio González Rodríguez essays commentary on the particular neo-liberal hell that is Ciudad Juarez, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua; a city of drugs and corruption, an upshot of rapid modernization, an atypical ecosystem that allows for the killings of hundreds of women and girls.

If you anticipate a jaw-dropping, stomach-twisting account of the brutal murders, this is the wrong read for you. Coming from a journalistic background, Rodríguez is cautious in avoiding a tabloid-like narrative; instead, he plays his better card – the analytical, integral examination of the events.

While the introduction can be read as an essay in its own right, the following chapters work like building blocks, examining separate issues that, put together, will spell the urban disaster that Juarez was destined to be. And so, the first chapter grounds a possibly unaware but avid reader in the city's boundaries: a border town and a backyard of the United States, a collage of gated communities and third world slums, a breeding ground for power and violence. At this point, it would be just to mention Rodríguez's descriptive, novelistic style of portraying the ways Juarez was tainted by industrial revolution, almost like a 'Mexican Lowry'. The rather brief history of the city of Juarez indicates to the always present inadequacies, as the city started as a mission in colonial 1888, moved on to being a tourists and immigrants' attraction in 1919-1921, a sex tourism place in the American prohibition times, and post World War Two, a nightlife spot in the '50s, a *maquila* centre in the '60s (a free trade zone exploiting cheap

labour), and a magnet for labour and instability in the 2000s.

The next chapter focuses on the spill over effects of Mexico's rapid modernization, as it became the first manufacturing-assembly country in the world. These developments have particularly affected Juarez, with 10 industries represented in the city, from the high skilled cosmopolitan workers to the low-wage, slum dwelling labourers. The architecture, according to Rodriguez, has also undergone massive transformations due to the unbecoming industrialization and now, through the forced appropriation of public space and 'container' like living, reflects the struggle for power, the economic inequalities, and the violence. The space, in this case factories, works as a 'microcosm of masculine concentration' where female workers are harassed and 'raffled' between high-ranking male employees.

A crucial consequence of rapid industrialization in a traditional society is that females, while gaining the right to work and to be self-sufficient, have lost the status of 'pure women' – mothers and daughters – and men interpreted women's financial independence as a personal offence. Thus, women started to be identified as dirty, as enticers; violence was given a green light and a woman's body was seen as a 'human terrarium for the *maquiladoras*'.

The third chapter is dedicated to the war on drugs and to the ineptitude and corruption of both local and central powers. Started in 2006, the war has generated 10,000 victims and has radicalized drug cartels and entire cities, bringing the army and federal police into Juarez. Lawlessness continued to rise and even the inhabitants had an aversion to the presence of armed troops. Rodriguez provides a methodical analysis of failures of the Mexican government, which, unfortunately, boasts a 99 per cent judicial impunity rate. He cites corruption, ignorance, a focus on social rebuilding policies rather than the straightforward attacks of the cartels, alienation of Juarez, criminalization of victims, a propagandistic attitude, and continuous rejection of assistance from UN and human activist groups.

Special attention is given to the Mexico-US relationship, with a refreshing perspective on US foreign policy, which is to blame for weapons dealing across the border, assassinations of journalists and agents, and the 'paramilitarization' of Latin America. The United States has been a staunch supporter of narcotics warfare, and Mexico's 'big brother' in its attempts to flush out drug cartels, but the US has failed to deliver border security and to assume some responsibility for the escalating violence in Juarez.

Only in the final chapter is there direct engagement with the femicide machine, notwithstanding earlier allusions, the commentary having come

full circle. The estimated 400 killings since 1993 are an atrocity that has gained remarkable international attention and has created quite a stir in media and academia alike, but it has only been at the periphery of the Mexican government's agenda. Rodriguez accuses officials of putting forth substitutive acts, which is to say the authorities had an administrative approach, by trying to compile victim lists, but at no time did they intend to tackle the roots of the problem, the drug cartels and their poisonous presence in Juarez.

Their deaths ignored, the victims become invisible and, for the second time, suffer 'social arrogance' and 'gender hatred'. Families are threatened by the cartels, while girls disappear every day. Drug lords grow stronger with every execution and elimination of threat; government officials try to survive from one election term to another, so that a 'collective amnesia' starts defining Juarez. *The Femicide Machine* suggests that only a fresh, unthought-of set of policies can invert the 'negative inertia' that Juarez and the state of Mexico are in, but for that, there is need of vigorous, flawless government.

The epilogue illustrates a story of one of the victims, in an effort to bring a human touch to a rather academic work, and it is a most welcome addition (except for the *Instructions for taking textual photographs* that seem to belong more in an avant-garde art installation, rather than in a scholarly study). There is a dearth of first-hand accounts of victims' family members; however, this deficiency is partially filled by references to local hip-hop, art and advertising and their rather covert expressions of frustration.

Upon reading *The Femicide Machine*, it becomes apparent that Rodriguez is not a novice in writing about the subject; he has skilfully addressed and connected the war machine, crime machine, and femicide machine in what becomes an all-encompassing study of one of 21<sup>st</sup> century's most mind-boggling atrocities. Contextually rich and honest, *The Femicide Machine* is the ultimate guide to understanding Juarez.

*Lucia Papureanu*

## The Meaning of Debt

**David Graeber, *Debt: the First 5,000 years*, Melville House Publishing, 2011, 534 pages, hardback ISBN 9781933633862, £21.99**

David Graeber is an anarchist who has supported protest occupations in the United States and elsewhere. *Debt: the First 5,000 years* offers a

general defence of his activities.

This is a big book, not only in bulk, more than 500 pages, including 100 pages of notes and index, but also in content. It has taken me several weeks to read and understand. It is a real surprise to find a book on economics written by an anthropologist, and one who has worked in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, while teaching at Goldsmith's College in the University of London.

Graeber manages to put into question many of the assumptions that economics writers from Adam Smith onwards have taken for granted, such as the historical precedence of barter before a money economy, and of coinage before paper money, and of states before markets. Above all in China, a thousand years ago, Graeber shows that money was generally what is called 'chartalist', i.e. paper money, and that the Confucian scholar bureaucrats managed the markets throughout China, using them to control both nomadic invasion and peasant revolt. He quotes one historian describing Greek slavery as a 'military coinage complex' both in Athens and under Alexander. He also shows that Chinese monasteries became early finance capitalists, which the bureaucracy had to destroy in the same way that they destroyed foreign trade, which challenged the whole imperial system of agricultural power. Once the original temple authority was replaced by states, the state everywhere created and controlled the market.

More than all this, Graeber reveals the remarkable association of our religious and philosophical words and concepts with financial and, indeed, mathematical origins. In English the very word 'rational', which economists use in speaking of 'rational choice', is derived from 'ratio', the relation of one number to another. The origin of the word 'interest', as in 'self-interest' or 'common interest', is the financial one, a penalty for late payment. In many languages there is the same word for 'debt' and 'guilt' and the same meaning for 'credit' and 'honour'. 'Thank you!' originally meant 'think of me!' (in repaying). 'Much obliged', as in the Portuguese, and 'de nada' ('for nothing'), as in Spanish, all have financial origins. The Christian concept of 'redemption' means paying your debts. The Lord's Prayer and Book of Common Prayer require us to forgive our debts, as we forgive those who are indebted to us, whether or not 'debts' are translated as 'trespasses'. Charles Kingsley popularised this in the good and bad fairies' messages: 'do as you would be done by' and 'be done by as you did'.

A huge revision in economic thinking is required as we read what Graeber writes. Adam Smith's faith in the self-interest, not the benevolence, of the butcher and baker in the market is, even according to Smith's own *Theory of Moral Sentiment*, regulated by the state which created the market in the

general interest of society, or more realistically, of those with greatest power in the state. The idea of a self-regulating market has no historical justification. In China, India and Roman Europe imperial rulers abandoned any pretension to a religious authority. Graeber describes the evolution of two spheres of human activity – on the one hand, the market, and on the other, religion – a division which persists today. He gives the example of the attitude to usury, the charging of interest, generally compounded, on borrowed money, and imposed by all forms of violence, including slavery and debt peonage. Every religion at one time condemned usury, but all moderated their condemnation over the years. This was as true of the extreme critics of usury such as Martin Luther as of more moderate Moslems and Indians. Graeber reminds us that Mohammed in early life had been a merchant.

In establishing the legitimacy of paper money, essentially by Act of the Bank of England in 1694, paper money was based in theory on the state's holdings of gold and silver. This Act really launched the modern economy, but there were many crises of trust, not least the South Sea Bubble of 1710, followed by other bubbles, as holdings of money stock were bid up in value, far above what was realisable. These bubbles had a real basis in the enormous value of the raw material produced by African slaves from the colonies, which, together with the wage slavery of English peasants divorced from their lands, formed the foundation of the industrial revolution.

But, Graeber insists, there was one crucial legal requirement: national company law had to give to the business corporation the same rights and privileges enjoyed by religious bodies and charities of being, in Medieval terms, 'fictive persons', and therefore separate from the shareholders in liability for taxation or criminal charges. Graeber describes Adam Smith's description of the capitalist system as a 'vision of an imaginary world almost entirely free of debt and credit, and therefore free of guilt and sin ... everything prearranged by God'. And yet, as Graeber ends his penultimate chapter on 'The Age of the Great Capitalist Empires', he notices that all capitalists, while working on the assumption that the system will last forever, take actions that guarantee its explosion. The collapse of 2008-9 is just the most recent.

In his last chapter, Graeber offers no solutions – except the Utopian idea of a jubilee cancelling of all debts world-wide. Learning from earlier empires, the message must be that believing the capitalist system can last for ever is to guarantee its early demise. But what is to follow on the planet is 'yet to be determined'. What is clear is that the national decisions about managing the system, at least by the largest national power, the United States, are determined, and the 'system' is not just a 'market system' but a

capital control system, where size determines everything.

Before the 1970s, the US had to borrow to finance wars and military spending, but that is no longer on the basis of a gold standard, since President Nixon, in 1971, ended convertibility of the dollar into gold. Money once more depended entirely on the faith which those who used the dollar placed in its continuing value, and that means those who issued credits and ran up debts in dollars. This depended on the unquestioned supreme power of the United States. But like all other previous empires based on huge standing armies, this one has come to be questioned.

Graeber asks us to keep our perspectives open; history is not over. In the years 1948-78, after the Second World War, there was a powerful movement to establish citizens' rights in Europe and in the subsequent years, up to 2008, access to capitalism became the driving force worldwide. The collapse in 2008 left people everywhere asking questions about the future of the system, which gave so much to the rich bankers and so little to the poor all over the world. Communism, which Graeber describes as a 'humanised' market, becomes possible, but built from below, not imposed from above, as in the Soviet Union. Human solidarity could still become more important than calculations of indebtedness, but that would require a 'clean slate' as all debts are cancelled.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Uprising

**Michael D. Yates (editor), *Wisconsin Uprising – Labour Fights Back*, Monthly Review Press, 2012, 304 pages, cloth ISBN 9781583672815, £50.00, paperback ISBN 9781583672808, £15.95**

The sudden explosion of protest in February 2011 on the streets of Madison, Wisconsin, undoubtedly helped to detonate the chain reaction which became the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. Perhaps we should be surprised that Wisconsin should have been the epicentre of such a rebellion - even in the United States it is generally regarded as a largely agricultural state, being the largest cheese producer in the country. Its supposed bucolic slumber was interrupted by the actions of one State Governor, Scott Walker, who brought to the surface the stored-up frustrations and anger provoked by the economic scapegoating that has been onerously levied on working people since the commencement of the crisis of 2008.

Historically, Wisconsin was represented in the 1950s by the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy and is where the Republican Party held its first meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1854. It is, however, also the state where, in 1886, at a demonstration calling for the eight-hour working day, seven marchers were shot dead by the state militia, and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a stronghold of the American Socialist Party. More recently, in Milwaukee, a socialist had been mayor up until 1960; the state capital, Madison, was the scene of massive demonstrations against the Vietnam War; and, in the 1990s, the unions and a number of community groups formed the Progressive Wisconsin Party which had some limited electoral success. Wisconsin's biggest area of economic activity is not agriculture but manufacturing and the largest employer is Wal-Mart. However, public sector employment takes six of the top ten places of the biggest employers. Therefore, on closer examination, Wisconsin is a locality where a campaign of union-busting and austerity cuts could potentially arouse profound popular anger. This it most certainly did, propelling thousands into eye-catching innovative action, rather than the usual acceptance and passive resentment. Some 14.1% of Wisconsin employees are represented by trade unions, higher than many states but not amongst the highest (predictably, the largest union membership is in the public sector). Necessarily, the latter took the lead, but private sector workers, initially at least, also joined in the struggle, although as usual the media sought to sow division.

*Wisconsin Uprising* is another contribution to the now extensive literature on the events in that State of early 2011, when an ambitious Republican Governor, Scott Walker, thought that he might assist his clambering up the hierarchy of the Republican Party's greasy pole by destroying the unions and dragooning the workforce. The method used was to be the abolition of collective bargaining and any recognition of the unions, including the withdrawal of 'checkoff', the docking of union dues. The only public sector workers to be excluded from these measures were the fire-fighters (who joined in solidarity activities anyway) and the police, whose attitude to the actual occupation was fairly tolerant and often accompanied by expressions of tacit sympathy. Prior to introducing his Budget Reform Bill, Scott Walker had driven through the privatisation of the education system and reductions in the pension and medical entitlements of public sector workers. These grievances, together with all the accumulated associated strictures of the recession, meant that for public service workers Governor Scott Walker's outlawing of collective bargaining was the last straw. The American Federation of Labor and

Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) national leaders and some of the local officials were surprised at the seemingly determined and spontaneous occupation of the legislative building and the intensity of the feelings aroused in so many public and private-sector workers, students and teachers, and even some members of the professional middle class. Again, this response has to be seen in the context of years of cutbacks to public services and privatisation of state assets, added to which Scott Walker had the audacity to cut local taxes for the rich.

The first section of *Wisconsin Uprising* describes events, the sectional interplay of forces and the tensions between the grassroots and the AFL-CIO leadership who sought to guide the struggle into calmer avenues, such as reverting to pressure from the Democratic Party. The leadership resisted appeals for a general strike then emanating from a considerable section of the protesters. After 30 years of defeats and falling trade union membership, the union leadership had narrowed their horizons, failing to realise that, within the context of the 2008 recession, Scott Walker and his ilk were interested not only in defeating the unions but also destroying them. As one of the contributors points out, the protesters seemed to realise spontaneously the acute danger Walker posed. Certainly, the workers and students protesting showed brilliant tactical and organisational sense by occupying the legislative space, the Capitol building (See *Spokesman* 115 pp74-76). They also showed further innovatory guile by using the new methods of internet communication to respond quickly and in large numbers, but at the end of the day they still looked to the old structures to channel their protest. This contradiction leads us into the second section of the book which discusses the lessons we should learn from the Wisconsin events and the wider implications for American trade unions. When it comes to a comparison, the similarities between the US and the UK experience of brutal neo-liberal attacks on the trade unions are often apparent.

Part Two of *Wisconsin Uprising* has contributions on the antecedents of the moves by Scott Walker in neighbouring states and the response to the abandonment of the 'checkoff' collection of union dues, the 'open shop' legal requirement, and the weakening of 'business unionism'. Will the new unco-operativeness of the employers with 'business unionism' cause the trade unions to gently fade away, having been rendered toothless, or will it mean a return to grassroots combativeness, involvement and leadership? Certainly, up until the events in Wisconsin, 'union leaders assumed they were defeated', according to Stephanie Luce in her article 'What can we learn from Wisconsin?' in which she itemises five points to stiffen

resistance within the movement.

Part Three of the book picks up the theme of how the Wisconsin events have general lessons for the revitalisation of the labour movement, but also its particularities, and how the struggle can be broadened and used to raise political awareness. The American labour movement, the writers feel, must have more than ever an international perspective, given the speed and depth of globalisation. Furthermore, given the United States' position of primacy in economic and military power (even if this economic power is being questioned more and more), its oppressive dominance in many situations makes it the *bête noire* of many popular movements, particularly in the developing world. But where does the labour movement stand in relation to the activities of its political leaders? The close alignment of the trade unions with the political élite regarding foreign policy throughout the Cold War period has still not been shaken off. This statement is qualified by David Bacon in his essay 'Marching Away from the Cold War' in which he outlines some of the shifts in perception and action adopted by the trade union movement. This change in attitude still has a long way to go to detach the unions from the coat tails of the leading national political machines of the Democratic and Republican parties.

Wisconsin is overwhelmingly ethnically white, as were the strikers and protesters, so lessons cannot easily be learnt with regard to ethnicity, whereas in many areas of the United States race and poverty are very live issues. For the contributors the labour movement must tackle the question of white supremacy in terms of membership, job allocation and employment and this is discussed in Part Three by Elly Leary, a former autoworker and union negotiator. Specific disputes by chemical workers, public sector employees and longshoremen serve to illustrate problems and tactical solutions for the unions. Section Three gives many insights into the condition of trade unions and society in general in the United States, which will be of interest to non-American readers. The book does, however, seem a little repetitive in the first section, but this is probably inherent in a discussion of the same events by several authors.

In his concluding remarks, the editor, Michael D. Yates, whilst not detracting from the contributors' realistic appraisal of the present state of trade unionism in the United States, is hopeful that there can be some sort of link-up between the Occupy Wall Street movement and the trade unions. There have been labour disputes where an alliance has been formed: in Oakland with the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Workers, and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in New York. However, a danger does exist, so the book opines, that the union leadership will try, as

in Wisconsin, to funnel protest through the Democratic Party. It is a fact that the Wisconsin workers were driven back to work and forced into accepting Scott Walker's terms.

*Wisconsin Uprising* was published well before Scott Walker's defeat of his recall vote of 5 June 2012 was known, but some of the reasons for the failure are to be found within its pages. The signs of a sustained debate within the American radical Left as to the causes of the defeat of the popular uprising should not obscure the tremendous accomplishment of sustaining a high level of active solidarity in battling with the forces of reaction not seen in the United States for many years. On the Left there is much criticism from the point of view that the defeat was inevitable as soon as the blind alley of electoral politics shackled to the Democratic Party was taken, and there is much truth in this. However, it is difficult to follow a new route when no road exists: that road has yet to be built, being an electoral party truly representing the interests of labour. In retrospect, let us hope that the vehemence of the oppositional campaign in Wisconsin will deter other Walker clones from similar endeavours - after all, buying success proved an expensive business. As Matthew Rothschild, editor of the left-wing US magazine, *The Progressive* (established in Madison in 1909), has stated:

'Walker is the darling of the vicious business class of America, he is a hero to every boss who wants to put his boot on the throat of labour.'

Undoubtedly, Walker's popularity in Wisconsin is due to the millions of dollars spent on television advertising which has enabled him to set private against public workers in a beggar-my-neighbour race to lower wages. Hard as it is, our response must be, as one participant has put it, that

'We have no choice but to continue the fight, and to take solace in the incredible community of solidarity we've built.'

*John Daniels*