

Reviews

Rose-tinted Kosovo

James Pettifer, *The Kosovo Liberation Army: Underground War to Balkan Insurgency, 1948-2001*, Hurst & Co, 2012, 320 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849041874, £29.99

James Pettifer has performed a remarkable exercise in seeking to rehabilitate the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from all the criticisms that have been made of it. This has required some major omissions of history and some even greater distortions. That anyone is prepared to read the story as it is told here arises from the fact that many generally well informed and well meaning people feel it necessary to justify the unforgivable NATO bombing of Belgrade and the appalling destruction it entailed, without any of the necessary authority of the United Nations for such an action. And this bombing became the precedent for similar military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and, it may be, Syria, without due UN sanction. The pretext for the Belgrade bombing was a supposed humanitarian need – to respond to a supposed ‘massacre’ of civilians by Serbian armed forces in 1999, under the authority of Serbia’s President, Slobodan Milosevic, near to a village called Racak in Kosovo.

At the time, I read the many hundreds of pages of the official record of the trial of Milosevic, and I wrote it up in my book *From Tito to Milosevic*, published in 2005, which Pettifer quotes only from my description of Yugoslavia in 1919, not what I was describing of the origins of the KLA eighty years later. Pettifer does briefly refer to the military training of the KLA in Croatia and to its dependence on finance from the Swiss, German and US diaspora, but underplays the overall influence of the United States. Ambassador William Walker, who had managed the US intervention against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, was the leader of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s supposedly independent ‘Kosovo Verification Mission’. Walker visited Racak after the so-called ‘massacre’, but he did not stay long enough to check whose the 45 bodies were, before reporting that a massacre had taken place. There had been a major battle between Serb and KLA forces, some of whom were not in uniform. Even Pettifer concedes that it was not easy to tell dead soldiers from dead civilians, but he still calls it a ‘massacre’, and Ambassador Walker’s judgement has influenced the course of history. Forensic evidence from the Racak dead has subsequently proved that the vast majority of the deaths

were typical of shootings in battle and not of executions, as had been claimed in naming the event a ‘massacre’.

Racak can only be understood in the light of the extremely complex variety of national interests in the break-up of Yugoslavia. Germany was interested in its capitalist investments in Croatia; Russia saw Serbia as a Slav communist ally; the USA, under President Clinton, wished to retain its friendly relations with the Islamic oil states and Bosnia did have a largely Muslim population. That left Kosovo as a province of Serbia with many Serbian towns and villages, but currently a mainly Albanian Muslim population. In the nineteenth century break-up of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, Albanians had been divided by the European powers between Serbia, Macedonia and the state of Albania. Greece would not tolerate a united Albanian state on its Macedonian frontier. In this book Pettifer tells us nothing of all this background, although he teaches Balkan history at Oxford.

The ‘liberation’ of Kosovo from its position as a province of Serbia is thus presented by Pettifer without explanation of the large population of Serbs and also of Romas in the province, nor of the long history of the Serbian orthodox church in Kosovo prior to Turkish rule and to the conversion of many Albanians to Islam. In particular, there is no mention of the most famous Christian monasteries at Decani and elsewhere, with their beautiful icons, which date back to the sixth century and are the object of adoration for many Serbs. There is no doubt that Milosevic exploited the divisions among the peoples of Kosovo to protect his control there, but this history cannot be neglected in telling the full story of these unhappy peoples.

The divisions among the peoples of Kosovo were most clearly revealed in the international conference at Rambouillet in France, in 1999. This conference gets scant reference in Pettifer’s book, and is not to be found anywhere in the book’s Index, but its role is quite essential to any understanding of the rise to power of the KLA. Peace of a sort had been achieved in 1995 in Bosnia by the Dayton Accords, under the authority of Milosevic, and it was hoped by many that this could be repeated. The European Union had discussed plans for a European Defence Force, but this had been subsumed within NATO. Only the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe existed, and the American William Walker was, as we have seen, acting in Kosovo for them. Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State, was determined to try to establish US authority over Milosevic and his Russian ally. A confirmed pacifist, Ibrahim Rugova had been elected to the acting presidency of Kosovo, as something of a response to the KLA, and he had several talks with Milosevic, which Pettifer does not mention. Many observers, and I was certainly one, hoped to see a UN

force on the job, but that was not proposed. Instead, an Anglo-French proposal of a conference at Rambouillet, supported by Robin Cook, UK Foreign Secretary, was claimed to be the only hope of a peaceful settlement. After much argument, an agreement was reached, establishing NATO's authority, and requiring both the withdrawal of Serbian armed forces and the disbanding of the KLA, but the Russian delegate left without giving his signature. Pettifer disregards the possibility of any agreement and assumes the inevitability of the subsequent rise to power of the KLA and of the high level US and NATO bombing, first of Kosovo and then of Belgrade, with all its terrible destruction of life and buildings, factories and services, with the aim of dislodging Milosevic.

The omission of Kosovo's Serbian Orthodox Church history and the distortion of the Racak and Rambouillet events are, unfortunately, not the only objections that I have to Pettifer's book. The role of the United States is further glossed over. There is no mention of the large US military base, Camp Bondsteel, established in Kosovo after the bombardment of Yugoslavia, or of the US oil pipeline being constructed through Kosovo to the port of Durres in Albania, with deep water for oil tankers to take delivery without the long journey round Africa to the USA and Europe. On top of this, there is not a word about the drug traffic through Kosovo, which Paddy Ashdown, who was there before going on, in 2002, to be the UN High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, complained of in his autobiography.

This is a far cry from the heroic ending to his story that Pettifer quotes from a Chicago-based activist that '... a handful of people can do miracles'. And Pettifer ends his book with the words: 'Thus the conspiracy becomes the history and escapes the fictional' – just a pity that there is so much fiction in Pettifer's story.

Michael Barratt Brown

China

Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, Harvard University Press, 2011, 878 pages, hardback ISBN 9780674055445, £29.95

In the West, the view of Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) is a matter of admiration for his conduct of China's economic liberalization and 'opening out' – in connection with which he is credited with lifting huge

numbers of Chinese out of poverty – and condemnation of his order for tanks to enter Tiananmen Square, a decision which led to the deaths of hundreds, perhaps thousands of demonstrating pro-democracy students and crushed any dream of political freedom to match economic change. These days commentators are more ready to congratulate Deng on the former achievement than they are inclined to condemn him for the latter horror, although in truth foreign investors rather quickly overcame whatever disgust they felt at the bloodshed of 4 June 1989. Ezra P. Vogel's weighty biography of Deng reflects this adjustment to a pragmatic line, with minute accounts of the domestic economic interventions, reclamation campaigns for the return of Hong Kong and Taiwan to mainland sovereignty, and foreign bridge-building of Deng's later career allowed to overshadow, in particular, his part in the catastrophe of the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958-1961), when an absurd Maoist plan for rapid catch-up with the West delivered, instead, death by starvation to tens of millions.

Indeed, the book is heavily weighted in favour of the period from 1969 when, in the midst of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Deng was banished to the countryside for being a 'capitalist roader', through his uneasy return to prominence in the 1970s, until the period of his pre-eminence from 1978 onwards. Vogel affords just 34 pages to the first 65 years of Deng's life, suggesting the author's decision to downplay Deng's complicity with Mao's high-handed destructiveness, but also the phase of Deng's career as a revolutionary politician, which might have provided a view of Deng less familiar to Western readers. We are sped through Deng's birth into a small landlord's family in Sichuan, his time in France as a student and worker, which was also the major period of his politicization. Scant space is given to this latter process, as if the question of Deng's intellectual and ethical development could be taken as read: like thousands of other young Chinese, it seems, Deng simply became a communist and that is all there is to say about it. Vogel is not much interested in his subject's philosophical outlook, and it is true that Deng was a 'pragmatist' far more than he was a man of ideas. Still, the fact that Deng was among the millions of young people in the first half of the 20th Century who found meaning in Marxism surely merits a little more attention, as does Deng's role as a political militant and organizer during the war against Japan and the civil war between Communist and nationalist forces.

This biography is, nevertheless, an extremely thorough account of Deng's struggle against the legacy of Mao, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four to reorient this vast, poor country, in which, thirty years after the coming to power of the Communists in 1949, starvation was still widespread. We

are given a full narrative of how Deng and his collaborators effected reforms of education and agriculture – ending collectivization and lifting millions of peasants out of poverty – and committed China to entering the modernity of science and technology, which was Deng's passion. Normalizing relations with Japan and the United States, countries to which Deng made celebrated trips in the 1970s, were also occasions for fact-finding about the developmental level of these advanced lands, which Deng knew, only too well, far outstripped China's own – a point that he never failed to hammer home to his audiences of Party and people.

At times, reading Vogel's book, one forgets that it is a biography, so concerned is the author to give all the necessary context to a life which is remarkable for its impact on hundreds of millions of people. This is to Vogel's credit, but it also exposes a problem with political biography as a form. To render the significance of such a person as Deng, one has to measure the circumstances of the subject's actions, in Deng's case, the party he worked in, with and against – Mao Zedong looms large here, of course – and the lives of those whom Deng governed. But this causes the reader to wonder whether, however significant this politician was, the proper area of focus should not have been the transformation of China, rather than the life of Deng. Vogel's study falls between two stools. When our attention is with Deng and his decision-making, the China outside of Zhongnanhai becomes abstract and blurry (although, perhaps, this truly reflects the view of the country from the protected vantage of the party's upper echelons). But when we are confronted with people responding to the effect of policy, for example, at the time of the Tiananmen killings, when hundreds of thousands of those used to being silent and accepting became vocal and demonstrative, one wants more of these others' subjectivity. There seems to be no moral or intellectual reason why we should not hear from the protesters themselves or those who can report on the people who were murdered. The book limits itself the point of view of the observer of the 1989 events.

Writing on 'Deng's Art of Governing' during the period of his 1980s pomp, Vogel records how, when Deng's office director Wang Ruilin gave account of his employer's views, 'he was very circumspect in what he said and avoided adding his own interpretation'. Roughly, there is a little of this approach in Vogel's study, which often seems content to reproduce the reasoning and outlook of Deng Xiaoping rather than comment upon it or add other perspectives, especially the perspectives of those outside the prevailing powers. Vogel is far from blind to the problems of contemporary China, including its grotesque, growing inequality and ruined environment.

Still, his work is far too admiring of a man widely lauded both within China and outside whose crimes it is now convenient and expedient to rationalize. The deeper reason for this may be the shared pragmatism of the biographer, his subject, and his successors about China's, and the world's, irresistible movement into the capitalist future.

Paul Brennan

Urban

Austin Williams and Alastair Donald (editors), *The Lure of the City – from Slums to Suburbs*, Pluto Press, 2011, 224 pages, hardback ISBN 978 0745331782, £60, paperback ISBN 9780745331775, £17.99

The possible future of cities is the focus of this edited collection of essays, concentrating on cities in England, China and Africa. The book also has chapters discussing more general ideas relating to city planning, the use of the past to secure attachment to locality, the use and abuse of public and private space, and ideas about the future of cities, positive or negative. Many of the contributors have been involved in the 'Mantownhuman' and Future Cities Project in England.

Although claiming that the book 'explores the paradoxes and contradictions, opportunities and challenges of an urban world', the chapters are an eclectic and, at times, confusing mix. The book is dominated by debates about architectural practice. They claim to be innovative but the overall perspective seems to be individualistic rather than progressive, and at times patronising. The role of politics, social policy and geography in the growth or decline of cities is barely acknowledged in most of the contributions. This leaves a sense that, generally, the book represents a narrow, selective view of a complex reality.

Alan Hudson writes about the development of cities in China, especially the phenomenal growth of Shanghai, in Chapter Two. His particular interest is not growth in itself but whether or not that growth can be said to be 'dynamic'. He argues that Chinese Communist Party planning (especially within the five year plans designed for national, provincial and municipal government) and capitalist development (ring-fenced by the Communist Party) run parallel to, rather than in conjunction with, the people who live in Chinese cities. There is little connection between the planners and the people, whether they be registered citizens or recently

arrived internal migrants from the rural hinterland. He argues that this creates a situation where there is potentially less trust or legitimacy in the system, the Chinese solution being to seek various ways of educating the citizen rather than engaging with potential contradictory behaviour or ideas. This is consistent with the apparent preference of Chinese planners for ecological views of city growth represented by the Chicago School:

‘The human ecology of cities is proving an attractive area ... since it allows the planner to retain the position of agent of progressive change, rather than ceding it to the less predictable citizen’.

The growth of Chinese cities is derived from capitalist ‘surplus’, which in turn is generated by the millions who have moved from the country to the city to escape poverty and environmental degradation. Hudson claims they have escaped ‘rural idiocy’ and ‘the inexorable grind of peasant subsistence’. His concern is simply ‘dynamism’ and whether the technical approach of Chinese planners is enough to capture this. The prospect of working excessive hours in factories with very poor pay and conditions is not addressed, but this is a feature of Chinese society challenging the legitimacy of current Communist Party priorities (and any of Hudson’s ideas about ‘dynamism’ too).

Dynamism in cities in the ‘West’ and Africa, comparing the growth of nineteenth-century London with that of twenty-first century Nairobi, is the underlying theme of Chapter Three. Alistair Donald’s concern seems to be that ‘modernisation’ (of infrastructure, facilities and housing) is being denied or restricted in the emergent cities of Africa. Ambivalence and anxiety mark western donor countries’ attitudes to the phenomenal growth of African cities, not least because of their burgeoning slums. Donald himself seems ambivalent: on the one hand condemning them (the dynamism of the city has passed these areas by) but on the other lauding the resilience of people forced to survive them (they have the determination to make a better life for themselves). The contrast between China (where the Communist Party ring-fences and uses capitalist surplus within the country) and Africa (where multinationals siphon off surplus for their own competitive advantage in a global economy) is not explored.

Throughout the book there is very little analysis of the impact of global finance on city development and the impact of neo-liberal ideas on the role of the state. The emphasis throughout is that of architectural practice and the apparent lack of vision current in the West, evident when comparisons are made with China and Africa today, or with London, Paris or New York in the past or, at a more current detailed level, in relation to ideas about

overcrowding, planning, the use of the past to create new city landscapes, and the control of movement by humans and by cars. Much of this writing is descriptive rather than analytical, using an eclectic variety of sources, which sometimes inadequately justify some very strongly worded opinions. Some comments are simply offensive. For example, in a discussion of ‘false urban memory syndrome’ in a chapter on the ‘historic’ city, Steve Nash and Austin Williams claim that

‘a heightened awareness of the past is symptomatic of those with little or no future. Pensioners or the terminally ill are at liberty to reminisce, but the fact that the country [the UK] is engaged in the equivalent of looking back to the good old days is a little tragic ...’

This is a good example of breathtaking professional arrogance, given the enormous shift in emphasis from the state to the ‘market’ and the impact of globalisation, which has had a devastating impact on people and places in the last thirty years.

Although references to Engels, Lefebvre and Marx are scattered throughout the book, it is difficult to pin down the politics underlying this writing. The contributors seem to be longing for an uncomplicated professional autonomy uncluttered by ‘green’ or ‘sustainable’ restrictions. Similarly, their focus is not about achieving social justice. For example, there is very little reference to the Coalition Government’s austerity programme in the UK and its impact on the construction industry or people needing homes. In Chapter Three on overcrowding, Patrick Hayes makes passing mention to cuts in housing benefit in the UK for those who are considered by the government to have too many bedrooms. Instead of detailed discussion of the impacts of this measure on place and space (surely architectural concerns) there is

‘... welfare benefit cuts may force “oversized” families out of London [but] the government’s pragmatic use of size limits should not be seen as a Chinese-style limit on population.’

On the contrary, the Coalition’s intention is far from pragmatic, and Hayes misunderstands the impact of these measures, too. In the private rented sector, 90,000 tenants have been affected already. From April 2013, in the social rented sector it is estimated that 670,000 will be affected with the worst hit areas in Yorkshire, the Midlands and London (where the poorest tenants will have to move or find money to make up the rent from funds supposed to be used for food and fuel.)

For anyone interested in a broader conception of the significance of the

city, David Harvey has written about ‘the right to the city’ (*New Left Review*, 53, September-October 2008.) While agreeing that ‘cities have arisen through geographical and social concentrations of surplus product’ and that ‘urbanisation has always been a class phenomenon’, he analyses the impact of capitalist development historically (including in relation to global financial capital) and the material, financial and emotional dispossession currently being inflicted on the poorest in different countries including those mentioned in *The Lure of the City*. Instead of ‘dynamism’, Harvey’s focus is on ‘the right to the city’; a political slogan which foregrounds the significance of the establishment or reinstatement of democratic control over urbanisation in all of its guises. As he points out, Lefebvre was right: the revolution has to be urban. The problem with the contributors to *The Lure of the City* is that they have a completely different future in mind.

Cathy Davis

Quite a Character

Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley, *Revolutionary Communist at Work – A Political Biography of Bert Ramelson*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2011, 414 pages, paperback ISBN 9781907103414, £25.00

Bert Ramelson (Baruch Rahmilevich Mendelson) was born in the ghetto of Cherkassy, a small town in the Ukraine, but in 1922, at the age of 12, he emigrated with his family to Canada. Showing aptitude at school, he enrolled at Alberta University and gained a law degree, but left Canada to work on a kibbutz in Palestine, before joining the Communist Party and the International Brigade in Spain, where he was wounded twice. After Spain he moved to Yorkshire where he was active in the trade union USDAW before being drafted into the army, in 1941, to fight in the Western Desert where he was captured near Tobruk. He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of war or waiting for demob in India but put the time to good use, as many other socialists did, finding it a fertile ground for the dissemination of radical ideas. After the army it comes as no surprise to see him enthusiastically accepting the full-time Communist Party post of Leeds Area Secretary and going on to become Yorkshire District Secretary in 1953. This official position meant that he was at the forefront of the Party’s industrial activities (second only to the Party’s National Industrial Organiser, Peter Kerrigan) whose position he filled on the latter’s retirement in 1965.

The book records some of the Party’s, and Ramelson’s, activities in the

Yorkshire period, mentioning a number of key rank and file militants, amongst them the redoubtable future Labour MP and advocate of workers' control, Joan Maynard. Worthy of special note is the authors' claim that Ramelson was responsible (together with his young YCL protégé, Arthur Scargill) both for the leftward shift of the Yorkshire NUM and the innovation of 'flying pickets'. Ramelson's activities in Yorkshire coincided with what the book terms the '*annus horribilis*' – 1956 and the bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet forces. In the context of this maelstrom, and given Ramelson's leadership position, the authors are at pains to demonstrate that Ramelson was no 'dull apparatchik'. The authors give an account of the case of *The Reasoner*, an unofficial dissident journal circulated in the Party, and edited by E P Thompson and John Saville. Ramelson's handling of the matter, according to the text, did show some sensitivity. It was settled without expulsions – both Thompson and Saville resigned from the Party – leaving on reasonably cordial terms, with Ramelson at least.

The year 1956 was a very difficult year for Ramelson, at a personal level as well as politically. When living in the Ukraine he was influenced by his 'Red Professor' elder sister Rosa, who remained in the Soviet Union. It was not until 1956, on a visit to Moscow, that he would meet her again, to discover that she had spent 20 years in the Gulag and her husband, also a committed communist, had died in the camps. Ramelson, however, whatever his personal feelings, still defended the Party line with 'gusto'. He obviously felt that whatever concerns Party members had about events in the Soviet bloc should be overridden by the necessity of remaining united. It is, unfortunately, all too easy to see that the failure to criticise fully the Soviet Union at this point lost the Party some 20% of its membership, and a whole group of its ablest minds. This contributed to its continuing marginalisation till dissolution in 1991. The text has Ramelson edging towards dissidence over quite a long period, certainly in relation to the doctrine of democratic centralism, but it comes with no satisfaction to have to say that, as with so many Party members, it was too little too late.

Ramelson's tenure as National Industrial Organiser corresponded with one of the most turbulent periods of British labour and political relations. The chapters in this book dealing with the battles of the 1960s and 70s are definitely the most pertinent and provoking sections of the book. He quickly established himself as a prominent figure on the national labour scene, thanks in part to the kind offices of Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who named him as the *éminence grise* behind the 1966 Seamen's Strike. The events of the period are discussed in some detail, outlining

Ramelson's often timely interventions, together with criticism of the non-communist left, justified and unjustified. The trade unions, and Ramelson to a large extent, were necessarily caught up in defensive struggles as legal encroachments were initiated to curtail trade union power. Defensive actions are, unfortunately, often defeated, and the opportunity was missed for a more creative and structurally incisive strategy based on workers' control. This strategy was misunderstood by many on the Left, partly because of the obvious dangers of co-option, but regrettably the oppositionists included Ramelson, who debated the issue with leading members of the Institute for Workers' Control (IWC) in the pages of *Marxism Today*. In this context, the book is insistent that Ramelson's tactical approach was different from his predecessor, Peter Kerrigan, and for that matter the Party leadership in general, when it came to directing the Party's industrial members. His was a non-authoritarian approach, which set the ideological direction rather than the organisational particularities. The book discusses his role in the debate on workers' control and his criticisms of the IWC and it does, in fact, make some fleeting criticism to the effect that he failed 'to give positive leadership on the issue'. The defensive battle par excellence was, of course, the 1984-5 miners' strike led by Arthur Scargill and, as the text makes clear, he and Ramelson had a long association stretching back to the 1950s. Ramelson's last direct intervention in an industrial dispute comes when he is brought out of retirement, six months into the strike, to try and persuade Scargill to soften his negotiating stance on pit closures to avoid a comprehensive defeat, but Scargill was pointedly dismissive.

Ramelson retired as National Industrial Organiser in 1977, but still worked full-time for the Party without a particular brief until he became the Party's representative on the editorial board of *World Marxist Review*. The latter duty meant that one week a month he would spend in Prague where the editorial committee was based. He cannot have failed to notice the dismal and repressive aspects of life in Czechoslovakia at that time, especially when pointed out by his ex-professorial window cleaner and former member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's Executive Committee. Increasingly, according to the book, he became more and more critical of aspects of communist practice and doctrine, whether in the Soviet bloc or emanating from the now distinctly Euro-communist leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The book sheds an interesting, if partisan, light upon the bitter struggle between the 'neo-Gramscian' Party hierarchy and the *Morning Star*. Ramelson's allegiance was still to the policies spelt out in the *British Road*

to Socialism, and he was firmly opposed to the new ideas emanating from such as Dave Purdy and Martin Jacques. He did not, however, play a central role in the dispute and the final schism, perhaps due to age and ill health and, when the Party was dissolved, Ramelson did not formally join any of the splinter groups.

Revolutionary Communist at Work has a certain pathos, as many of the causes Ramelson was associated with, or actively initiated, ended in final defeat. The industrial struggles of the 1970s ended with the cataclysm of Thatcher, and the ‘socialist states’ disappeared amidst scenes of capitalist plunder and jubilation. Of course, the book does over-egg the pudding a little when it comes to his role, and probably tries to make him appear, perhaps a more independent figure within the Party than he was. It does also make an effort to both defend him from accusations of a highly contentious nature, and to mount a generalised defence of Party members who were not ‘complicit in Stalinism’s crimes against humanity’. The book gets a few dates wrong and chronologically it can be quite confusing but it still remains a stimulating retrospective look at some of the events that shaped our present, both nationally and internationally. The one thing that does come out of the book is Ramelson’s formidable personality. He was a vigorous and accomplished orator, convivial in manner, knowledgeable and still committed to an optimistic Marxist vision of the possibilities for socialism – and obviously quite a character.

John Daniels

Frank Thompson

Peter J. Conradi, *A Very English Hero: The Making of Frank Thompson*, Bloomsbury 2012, 432 pages, hardback ISBN 9781408802434, £18.99

I was at the Dragon School in Oxford with Frank, two years younger than me, and I kept in touch with him and his younger brother Edward in the holidays when Frank went to Winchester. But our most memorable meeting was a few days after the Second World War was declared in September 1939. I had met with some pacifist friends at a favourite student café in Oxford to discuss a letter I had received from Michael Rowntree telling me that his father, Arnold Rowntree, and Paul Cadbury had decided to re-form the Friends Ambulance Unit. I had agreed with Michael to join, and was supported by David Caulkin. Frank burst in on our meeting,

slightly drunk, and told us that we were all wrong. The Nazis and fascism had to be destroyed, he said, and communism rescued from the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939. Frank already called himself a communist.

Frank told us that he was going to join up. When we said that he was too young, he replied that he would give a false date of birth. Whatever he said, he did get into the army and was very soon commissioned and joined an intelligence unit, called 'Phantom', and then the Special Operations Executive (SOE), a somewhat more open intelligence organisation. He served first in Sicily, then with the Yugoslav Partisans, and from them joined the resistance in Bulgaria, where he was captured and executed in 1944. Frank's brother Edward and their mother wrote a memorial of Frank, entitled *There is a Spirit in Europe*, a phrase taken from a poem by Frank. I sent my father this tribute in 1947, to help to explain my own desertion of Quakerism for communism. It lay by my father's bedside, when my father died in that year.

There have been several books about Frank Thompson, notably Conradi's biography of Iris Murdoch, Frank's great love, and his collection of the letters of Iris Murdoch, and the collection of Frank's poems made by Dorothy Thompson. But this book is even more deeply researched, and seeks to explain, as the title suggests, what made this 'very English hero'. Home and schools must account for much. Frank's father's love of India, where he had been a missionary, left a lasting impression, but the loving care of Frank's mother, Theo, must be recognised as central. Of his friends, Iris Murdoch stands out, and when Iris retired to her studies, Desiree Cumberledge, with whom Frank corresponded, took her place.

Frank's conversion to communism was not just a personal matter, but the result of world events, notably the Spanish Civil War, and of Frank's friends, the Carritts, who went to Spain to fight and die. I was almost equally affected by that war. I would not have fought but I would have driven an ambulance and probably got killed, like Julian Bell. But my father put his foot down, and persuaded me to continue my studies. I must be grateful. Frank always thought he was older than he was in reality; he was big. I always thought I was younger. I was small. Communism did seem to many intelligent people, such as Iris Murdoch, Maurice Dobb or Eric Hobsbawm, to be the answer to the iniquities of capitalism and imperialism.

Although perhaps, Conradi suggests, after Frank's death, Iris claimed too much for Frank's relationship with her, there can be no doubt about its importance for Frank. That is not to say that her declared love for MRD Foot drove Frank to suicidal exploits in Bulgaria. His support for the Bulgarian Resistance can be understood from his experience of the successful struggles

of the Yugoslav Partisans in fighting the Nazis and from his determination that the Bulgarian resistance should be equally successful.

There was much distress for Frank's family in the long delay in the announcement of his death and in the unclear details of his capture and execution without trial or application of the Geneva Convention concerning captured enemy soldiers. But there does not seem, according to Conradi's review of the evidence, to be any justification for the wilder conclusions that Frank was deliberately abandoned by the British Army or as the result of any agreement to abandon him between the British and Soviet commands.

What this biography shows very clearly is Frank Thompson's warm hearted simplicity that any one who met him could recognise, and in his writing his belief in love and courage as his guiding principles. He had enormous admiration for the camaraderie, courage and resourcefulness of his fellow soldiers and not a moment's consciousness of class differences. To his two nearest and dearest, Iris Murdoch and his brother Edward, he begged them not to judge people by their class as others do, but to see them all as individuals. For someone in his early twenties this was remarkable wisdom. But he was truly much older than his age.

Frank's death at 23 was a tragic loss of a brilliantly talented and gifted young man. Just to record his linguistic ability, mastery of seven languages – English, Russian, Polish, German, Italian, French and Arabic – is to recognise an extraordinary person, and at the same time we have to notice his modesty and self-effacement. Every one complained of Frank's untidiness, but all had to accept his rejection of what he called 'psychological kit inspection'. In all things he followed his beloved Greeks in saying, 'Know thyself!'

Michael Barratt Brown

Ever Closer?

Jurgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response*, Polity, 2012, 140 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745662428, £16.99

The old saw 'German jokes, they're no laughing matter!' can equally be true of German books, and Jurgen Habermas's *The Crisis of the European Union* is a perfect example. Here, one of Europe's pre-eminent philosophers is determined not to pander to those whose daily bread and butter is not moral philosophy and international law. A typical sentence is,

'The main challenge at the institutional level, however, is to recover the equal standing and symmetrical relation in the distribution of functions and legislative competences which we ascribe reconstructively to the European peoples and EU citizens as constitution-founding subjects' (p43).

It is somewhat of a relief that *The Crisis* is only 140 pages long. But more's the pity, because Habermas has some important things to say that peer out at intervals from the verbiage.

The book is an eclectic collection of Habermas's post-crisis writings; a long essay on the European Constitution, followed by the reprint of a paper on the concept of human dignity from the journal *Metaphilosophy*, an interview for *Die Zeit* on the European financial crisis, and two short articles for *Die Zeit* again and *Suddeutschen Zeitung*.

The paper on human dignity is the subordinate part of the book. In summary, Habermas pleads for it to become the core part of a reformed UN work, alongside global peacemaking. It is the idea of human dignity that underpins that of human rights, themselves a product of violent and, at times, revolutionary struggles. Presently, the highly selective and short-sighted decisions of a non-representative and far from impartial Security Council make for a suspicion that the programme of human rights consists of its imperialist misuse. That cannot be allowed to continue.

The core of the book is how to respond to the EU's ongoing travails. For Habermas the world financial crisis was a car crash just waiting to happen. Globalisation has so leapt ahead of political institutions that it has left nation states and coalitions of nation states completely incapable of exerting control over the global casino that purports to be the international financial institutions. The lunatics were left in control of the asylum. The job of politics is not to moralize but to act. The problem is that the European Union has been too slow, too cowardly and too conservative. Merkel dithered in the face of an imminent financial meltdown, and when she finally agreed to act – in concert with the other Eurozone leaders – she did the right thing in the wrong way. With her politics perhaps this is not really a surprise.

The proposals put into place a political steering mechanism to direct and drive European Economic and Monetary Union and promote competitiveness that will intrude far beyond fiscal policy into labour law and social policy that, in consequence, will rip out the heart of member state parliamentary purpose. Habermas does not cavil at this usurpation of sovereignty; rather he welcomes it as entirely necessary. For him, to not take such steps would be self-destructive and self-harming.

Whose hand will be on the tiller? The current proposals would institute

an executive federalism that would set back democratic accountability by generations. There would be a loss of democracy at the European level that would de-legitimize its decisions. The answer is not ‘less Europe’, rather a demand and struggle for transnational democracy where individuals come to see themselves simultaneously as British and European, in which the European Parliament’s powers match those of the Council of Ministers and the Commission becomes the executive arm of the two.

For Habermas the democratic process must be uncoupled from nation states, and there must be not only European Peoples but also European Citizens. If we are to escape the long shadow of nationalism, if we are to protect the European welfare state model, there is no alternative. To do this will not be easy.

Europe needs a constitutional debate to mirror that of September 1787 and August 1788 in North America. We need a Europeanisation of the existing party system. Social Democratic Parties must break out of their national cages and give themselves room to manoeuvre on the continental and global stage where our individual and collective future will play out.

It will be a David and Goliath fight. The asymmetry of interest and participation – partly media driven – in national and European politics tells its own story. But, if Habermas is right, the fight against climate change and for financial security, to control new technological threats and to maintain living standards can only be fought at a European level. He believes the failure of the European project is a real possibility. For those who want to know what that means, look to China. It disappeared from history for almost half a millennium. The danger in Britain – and European member states – is that national solipsism continues as the political orthodoxy.

Glyn Ford

Read widely

Philip Bounds, *British Communism and the Politics of Literature 1928-1939*, Merlin Press, 2012, 320 pages, paperback ISBN 9780850365948, 18.95

‘The Communist Party of Great Britain was notorious for the low proportion of intellectuals in its ranks by comparison with the international communist movement as a whole.’

John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters, 1969

A sentence understandably not quoted by Bounds, who rebukes Gross for being ‘deeply unfair’ to most of the relevant ideologues, albeit happy to lean on him for details of J. C. Squire, seemingly unaware of Patrick Howarth’s 1963 biography. While Gross cannot compare with the breadth, depth, and documentation of Bounds’ widely acclaimed volume, his 20 pages win hands down for readability.

The veteran Bounds has read widely, albeit his homework is hard to mark, thanks to lack of formal Bibliography (partly redeemed by his annotated gallery of individuals and detailed Index), details having to be expiscated from 57 pages of end-notes, frequently mini-essays in themselves. The exposition is clear, laudably jargon-free, but stodgily prolix and repetitive, in urgent need of that now-extinct species, the sub-editor.

Claims to novelty are exaggerated. Apart from the complementary Neal Woods’ *Communism and British Intellectuals* (1959; cf. Leon Epstein’s review, *Political Science Quarterly* 75, 1960, 140-142), there is a 15-page essay at *sdonline.org*, also relevant treatments of CPGB history by, for example, Noreen Branson, James Eaden, and James Jupp – no ‘astonishing neglect’ here. Of adjacent interest, now, is Jamie Susskind’s *Karl Marx and British Intellectuals in the 1930s* (2011).

Glances extra-Party would have illuminated. Graham Greene’s *It’s a Battlefield* focuses communists and communism. Stalinists v. Trotskyists significantly preponderate in the 1930s narrative of Anthony Powell’s *Dance to the Music of Time*.

Chapters One and Two (on ‘Left Sectarianism’ & ‘Revolutionary Traditionalism’) are a cornucopia of big names. One prominence is John Strachey, now best remembered for his groundnuts fiasco. Being a fellow-classicist, I was glad to see Australian-born Jack Lindsay here, albeit no mention of his marxisant novel *Rome for Sale*. There is also much on Eliot and Leavis from the other side.

Chapters Three to Five respectively focus on Alick West, Ralph Fox, and Christopher Caudwell. On this last, whose *Studies in a Dying Culture* remains alive and kicking, Bounds reluctantly acknowledges his inconsistencies, self-contradictions, and vapid rhetoric. I side with Gross’ scornful dismissal of Caudwell in favour of Christopher Hill.

Chapter Six examines ‘the wider political influences on British cultural Marxism’, post-luded by a Conclusion largely devoted to Cultural Studies, a term generally credited to Richard Hoggart (1964) or (as Christopher Hitchens) to Raymond Williams. No mention of their guru, Stuart Hall’s, classic 1989 lecture thereon. *Apropos* of Hall’s ‘encoding-decoding’

nuances, fellow Brummie David Lodge makes his fictional Morris Zapp proclaim ‘every decoding is another encoding’. I recall the wag who said ‘Cultural Studies is just saying obvious things and pretending they mean something’.

This précis emphatically does not do justice to Bounds’ bounds, richly extending from Aveling and Eleanor Marx to Gramsci and Raymond Williams. Still, as Palme Dutt (thrice mentioned) notoriously said of Stalin, there are spots on Bounds’ sun. He reproduces the common misrepresentation of Edward Upward on Marxism as the only tenable literary basis. As Orwell (*Inside the Whale*) pointed out, Upward qualified this with his italicised ‘*at the present time*’. Talking of Orwell, it’s unlikely (p. 243) that he filched material from Alec Brown, of whom he was so unaware as to muddle his name with Philip Henderson’s (Peter Davison, *The Lost Orwell*, 2006, p. 170). C. L. R. James is oddly classified as ‘non-communist’. Discreet anti-Trotskyism? No such qualification about T. A. Jackson, chiefly associated with the SPGB. Talking of Trotsky – unfairly denounced for ‘self-dramatisation’ – *Literature and Revolution* gets less than its due. MacLeish’s *Frescoes* poem is not ‘now forgotten’, living widely on internet sites. Harold Heslop was no rarity as proletarian novelist; cf. the relevant online lists. And (a classicist’s niggle), Caligula did not have his throat cut.

Select bibliographical addenda. Caudwell: Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science* (1985), plus James Whetter, *A British Hero* (2011); Fox: *Ralph Fox: a Writer in Arms* (1937, ed. John Lehmann/T. A. Jackson/C. Day Lewis), also Eric Biddulph’s online memoir; Alick West: one-time Trotskyist Peter Cadogan, *International Socialism* 3 (1960), 28 – online. Also, is the second Aveling-Marx lecture on *Shelley’s Socialism* really lost (p. 34)? If so, all modern reprints deceive in advertising both.

Overall, Bounds overstates his case but there is a case to be overstated. Literary independence and political subservience must be distinguished. The latter can hardly be denied, e.g. in the cases of Palme Dutt, Harry Pollitt, the CPGB in 1939 and 1956 – look what happened to Peter Fryer’s Hungarian reports. The 1930s intellectuals were hardly likely to display monolithic kow-towing to a ‘Moscow line’, given their own ideological and personal discords. Nor should a uniform Soviet cultural line be presumed. Here, Socialist Realism raises its controversial head. Bounds does not go into its origins enough, saying merely (p. 63) ‘The term was allegedly coined by Stalin during a discussion with Maxim Gorki and others in 1932,’ taking this (p. 266 n. 11) only from Cullerne Brown’s *Art Under Stalin* (1991, p. 89), ignoring both Lynn Mally’s ‘Autonomous

Theatre and the Origins of Socialist Realism', *Russian Review* 52, 1993, 198-212, and the many articles and books of Herman Ermolaev, e.g. 'The Emergence and Early Evolution of Socialist Realism (1932-1934)', *California Slavic Studies* 2 (1963), 141-168. The term was first used in the 25 May 1932 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the policy itself subsequently cooked up at the First Congress of Soviet Writers (1934). When announced by Ivan Gronsky, his literary audience jeered (Edward Radzinsky, *Stalin*, 1996, p. 271). Stalin himself (Mally, p. 207) was more concerned with creating an art 'socialist in content, national in form'. Later, though, Stalin caused consternation when, in 1950, his *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (rightly said by Robert Service, *Stalin*, 2004, p. 565, to be 'unjustly ignored') sensibly demolished Nicolai Marr's twaddle about bourgeois v. socialist Russian language by insisting that all languages were pre-capitalist in origin and (dialects apart) common to their speakers.

Despite aforementioned imperfections and some sense of *déjà lu*, this is a rich (my original 40 pages of notes and queries being their own tribute) synthetic/synoptic analysis of an important and ever-intriguing topic; a true display of haecceity. My appetite is whetted for his promised memoir of the Left in Wales – this Philip knows no bounds.

Barry Baldwin

Coalfield History

Jonathan Symcox (editor), *The 1984-1985 Miners' Strike in Nottinghamshire – The Diary of John Lowe*, Wharncliffe Books, 2011, paperback ISBN 9781845631444, £12.99

It is some 29 years since that epic struggle between the miners and the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, and we can now clearly see it was a milestone victory for our indigenous élite in its drive towards intensifying inequality and restoring its paramount position in British society. This defeat, together with the continuing contrived levels of unemployment and anti-union legal enactments, has done much to critically weaken the trade unions. One of the clear messages to emerge from this contemporaneous diary is that the class war warriors of the Conservative Government were prepared to use all the forces of the state to crush the miners, whatever the financial cost.

This is the diary of one miner, an ordinary member of the NUM who, appalled by the inactivity of his local colliery officials as the strike escalated,

took the initiative at his colliery, Clipstone, in organising a strike support committee for those workers prepared to heed the official strike call. By this action John Lowe proved, in the words of his grandson (a writer and journalist who edited this book) to be ‘foremost a man of principle and honour’. As well as being a personal testimony and an important historical document, it is necessarily a very emotional record of commitment to a cause that split a community. The tone is well set in a moving foreword by Dennis Skinner, who knew the diarist growing up in Clay Cross.

A number of major themes flow through the diary, not least the level of officially sanctioned police violence and provocation, supported by a pliant media and endorsed by the local magistracy. Of the many incidents mentioned, two exemplify the harsh policing tactics. In one incident an infirm pensioner, over 70 years old, driving to see his daughter, was stopped at a police road-block. An ex-miner, he had the ‘misfortune’ to be wearing a ‘coal not dole’ badge on his lapel, and was dragged from his car, badly bruised, and his vehicle disabled by removal of the rotary arm. Collected by his son, the pair drove back to Mansfield, and were again stopped by police, and this time the son was dragged from the vehicle and both were taken to Mansfield police station. Then there is the whole episode of John Lowe’s own arrest whilst on the picket line, which was both brutal and contrived by the police who consistently lied about a supposed assault. In the end John was fined and with costs had to pay £364.00 for, as he put it, ‘sitting on the bloody grass’. The police, often with the compliance of some magistrates, were in many cases able to prevent bail and legal aid being granted, in order to increase hardship and increase the fear, and actuality, of being sent to Lincoln Prison. The use of undercover tactics, with people posing as sympathetic legal advisers or arrested miners (the latter being placed in cells with other arrested miners for the purpose of gathering information relating to a particular incident or the dispute in general) was common. Clearly, the police were under orders to provoke incidents where possible and to make life as difficult as they could for those picketing. One of the descriptions of police methods in the book compares them to wolves:

‘When there’s one he stands off and watches. When there’s two they close in a little and still watch. When there’s three they attack.’

The police are certainly one group of workers who prospered under the Thatcher dispensation, seeming to display the confident arrogance of assumed impunity, as the latest Hillsborough Inquiry has recently highlighted.

Things were financially tough for all the strikers from the outset of the dispute but, as the sequestration orders and the cumulative hardship intensified, it inevitably placed a great strain on their solidarity and cohesion. Matters were particularly difficult in the Nottinghamshire coalfield where, of course, the strikers were in a minority. Neighbours, friends and families were divided over the dispute, and public manifestations of conflict must have been relatively commonplace. The book records instances of many strikers receiving vitriolic anonymous letters and worse. The author only mentions sparingly, understandably so, the fact that he was at loggerheads with two of his sons over the dispute, which was very upsetting as he and his wife saw little of their grandchildren for a long period. The loss of contact with the children had a very serious effect on Elsie Lowe, John's wife, who supported him throughout the dispute and played an active role in the Women's Support Group.

The Women's Support Group was magnificent throughout the dispute, although they were no more immune to the ups-and-downs than the male Strike Committee, given the increasing hardship as the dispute persisted. The group played a major role in the successful struggle to obtain premises for a strike headquarters by the occupation of the Clipstone Welfare Youth Centre. During very hectic periods the Clipstone Women's Support Group was providing 300 meals a day. Their final act of defiance and support for the men was to turn out for the last picket when the delegate conference decided to end the dispute. The organising of the three daily picketing operations at the pit head, flying pickets around the county, managing the finances of the operation with insufficient funds, legal aid, fund raising, publicising and gathering support for the strikers – all this demonstrates the talents, intelligence and courage of working people faced with the might of the state.

The book has many photographs, some taken by John Lowe, but also facsimiles of letters, leaflets and documents which are both informative and evocative of the emotional temperature and locale of the dispute. Reading between the lines, the author must have had periods when he was doubtful of a successful outcome to the strike, although he remained outwardly optimistic throughout its duration despite the high personal cost. This was a battle that had to be fought, although the enemy had provoked conflict at a time when they were well prepared. However, he voices no substantial criticism of the union leadership, except to say that they did not take into account sufficiently the minority position of the Nottinghamshire strikers and the threat of the NUM locally to break away

from the union. He does have harsh words for the Kinnock leadership, the local Labour MP at the time, Don Concannon, and other trade union leaders who failed to show sufficient real support for the miners. As for the scabs' union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, only recently it recorded another chapter in its ignominious decomposition with one of its former leaders, Neil Greatrex, convicted of the theft of £150,000 from a miners' nursing and residential home. The union had previously been criticised for paying its top officials 'fat cat' levels of remuneration, and the Labour MP for Bassetlaw, John Mann, has called on the police to renew their investigation into the UDM's connection with solicitors who were struck off for overcharging and inadequate attention to miners' injury compensation claims (*The Guardian*, 03/04/2012).

This is an inspiring book that deserves to be read widely, particularly in the Nottinghamshire area, which has never really recovered economically from the destruction of the coal industry. Whilst the full story of the strike and its aftermath in the Nottinghamshire Coalfield, including the final closures by the Major government, has yet to be told, this book will be an invaluable source and guide. The diary also stands as a fitting memorial to a true working class hero, John Lowe, who died in 2005.

John Daniels

Occupy!

Michael Albert, Mark Evans, Mandini Majavu, David Marty and Jessica Azulay, *Fanfare for the Future Vol. 1: Occupy Theory, Vol. 2: Occupy Vision and Vol. 3: Occupy Strategy*, Z Books, 2012, Kindle Editions (ISBNs – none available)

Toward the end of 2011, the global Occupy! movement began to capture the imaginations of all those in society who hankered after change. The people, the 99% as they came to be known, were calling for a change to the way the social order was constructed and managed. This call to transform society from a corporate-led machine to something in which we can all participate is still being advanced today.

The peaceful mass sit-ins of Occupy!, coupled with the sometimes violent revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, not too mention the protests in Portugal, Spain and Greece, highlight a rejection of the existing system by many citizens. Revolutions and protests are, by their very nature, ways of changing how society functions.

It is this alteration to the way the world works that is at the heart of the three volumes in the *Fanfare for the Future* series. As the authors say,

'Fanfare for the Future is three volumes about winning social changes that reorient whole societies by altering institutions at the heart of the lives of all people'.

The transformation of the system comes from the people who face difficulties on a day-to-day basis, and these three books are aimed directly at them.

The three volumes are written with the purpose of enabling readers to think for themselves about the best ways to alter society. In order to achieve this, the authors suggest that we need to think differently about the world around us. To help readers understand how to change things, the authors propose that we get to grips with where to start, what the final goal is, and what's the best way of getting from A to B.

Occupy Theory (Vol. 1) presents issues highlighted by the movement, such as greed and corruption, and asks readers to consider the best ways in which to address such problems. The authors identify four structures of society that have most impact upon people's lives: the economy, kinship, culture and polity. These structures, they argue, enable society to function, but if one of them fails to function efficiently, then something must be done to fix it. Many social problems are caused by a malfunction in one (or more) of these four areas, and the authors cite the economic crisis of 2007-2008, wars, poverty and unemployment as prime examples of such failures.

Occupy Vision (Vol. 2) presents a case for what the future could look like based on the ideas in Volume 1. It builds on what needs changing, as discussed in *Occupy Theory*, by offering alternative ways for society to be structured:

'The result is not capitalist, not 20th century socialist, not authoritarian, not sexist or heterosexist, not racist or nationalistic, not ecocidal, and not imperialist. It is, instead, in its values and its institutions: participatory economic, self-managing, feminist, intercommunalist, peaceful.'

The final volume, *Occupy Strategy*, addresses the approach and tactics required to bring about a participatory society that would realise the vision set out in *Occupy Vision*.

All three titles are easy to read and understand, and they pay due homage to the Occupy! movement of 2011/12. In both the movement and the *Fanfare* series, to 'occupy' means to take a space used for one purpose

and use it for something else. The space within these books is used to present ideas about how to change society, which can then be ‘repurposed’ by those who are disenfranchised. They provide a small platform from which readers can begin to connect ideas and make a difference to our world.

Abi Rhodes

Corporate Paranoia

Evelin Lubbers, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark – Corporate and Police Spying on Activists*, Pluto Press, 2012, 272 pages, hardback ISBN 9780745331867, £66.50, paperback ISBN 9780745331850, £19.99

Was this book originally a doctoral thesis? It’s a pretty dull read. As all doctoral dissertations have to be, it is well researched – almost over-researched. The references get in the way of a smooth read. While you are happily reading along, there is (see Barratt Brown 5000 BC, Coates 1850, Potter 1940, Simpson 2011). See what I mean? All this reference tends to get in the way. Has the author never heard of footnotes? It is an earnest, worthy, over-intense work that could have been better farmed out as a monograph, or a long essay in the *London Review of Books*. Too long, alas, for *The Spokesman*!

If the author wants a wider public, she will be doomed to disappointment. A pity, because the message is an important one: big business will go to almost any lengths to cripple its critics; lying, spying and infiltrating are the names of the games. Have you, dear reader, ever participated in any kind of completely legal form of dissent? CND? Moves against Monsanto? MacDonalds? Shell? The weapons trade? And many more who put profit before all else. You will, probably, have been spied on, lied to and betrayed.

Let us take an imaginary example that represents many of the cases that appear in the book: I strike up a correspondence with Ken Coates and Tony Simpson. They don’t give much away, but when they ask me to write a review, they let slip they will be publishing an article about a certain person or organisation. *The Spokesman* being a Lefty magazine, the article will almost certainly be critical. I pass the news on so that those criticised are ready with the PR and spin to rubbish *The Spokesman*. You get the idea. Don’t trust anyone. Paranoia, if it exists at all, is a rare condition. They usually *are* out to get you, spy on you, lie to you, betray you, and

destroy or dismantle and disarm you.

The author, in her boring, pedantic way, warns us that all this secrecy, these hidden agendas are a threat to ‘Democracy’. Now, I wonder, which democracies did she have in mind? Most of the democracies I know are one-party states and, of course, have their élites. The oligarchs will take almost any measures to protect their interests and push their business and profits. So what else is new?

Actually, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark* is quite reassuring. Liberals who plough their way through this academic stuff will raise their hands in horror. ‘It didn’t ought to be allowed. Something must be done!’ But they should be calmed. Democracy is at work. It is extraordinary that big business goes to such extraordinary lengths, and at such cost, to deflate its opponents. In many parts of the world they wouldn’t bother. They would just whack ’em.

Nigel Potter
Honduras