

Reviews

Backbone of the underground

Nancy Stout, with a Foreword by Alice Walker, *One Day in December – Celia Sánchez and the Cuban Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, 2013, 472 pages, hardback ISBN 9781583673171, £28.95

Celia Sánchez was Fidel Castro's right-hand woman. She was the daughter of a country doctor, something of a radical himself, a single woman dutifully devoted to looking after daddy and doing good works with a Catholic organisation. It was a superb cover for her underground work. She was in on the Cuban Revolution from the very beginning. Her handler was a remarkable young man, Frank País (later murdered by Batista's goons) who deserves to be as iconic as 'Che' Guevara. (But then so do many others, brave young women and men who were killed in the early days – because of the Cuban Revolution's success and survival they tend to be forgotten).

Celia knew the coast well and was responsible for choosing suitable landing places for the revolutionaries leaving Mexico in their boat *Granma* and organising underground reception committees, which she did with what was her usual efficiency and competence. It was to no avail, of course. As all the world knows, the landing was a fiasco and of the 80 guerrillas on board, only about 16 survived to fight another day. But this is what makes *One Day in December* so interesting: it strongly emphasises the role of the underground, often overshadowed by the guerrilla campaign in the Sierra Maestra. It was difficult and dangerous work, but absolutely vital. When the cover of one of them was blown they went into hiding, where they were still in danger but useless for further work. Very often, they fled to the 'safety' of the Sierra Maestra where, at least, there were weapons, cover and company. Without the underground and the 'Farmers' Militia', the guerrillas in the mountains could never have survived and when, in the end, they won, the fighters never forgot the debt they owed. (The 'Farmers' Militia' were local farmers, wealthy landowners to peasants, who were anti-Batista and pro-Castro).

Celia Sánchez, along with her handler, Frank País, was the backbone of the underground. She led a very dangerous double life, responsible for organising the training of new recruits and hiding them, as well as weapons and ammunition; everything, in fact, down to the supply of cigars and Fidel's glasses. Eventually, with a price on her head, wanted 'dead or

alive', she too fled to the Sierra Maestra, took up arms and fought alongside her comrades. Unlike many of them, but like the Castro brothers, Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos, she seems to have had a charmed life.

Once Sánchez is in the mountains, you get a good picture of guerrilla life in the Sierra: a mixture of hard fact, anecdote, even gossip. Over ten years, the author was allowed access to many archives, but not all. She interviewed many veterans of the war – perhaps unsurprisingly, the guerrillas in the mountains were much more forthcoming than the survivors from the underground. Old habits of keeping your mouth shut die hard. She also interviewed members of Celia's family and her adopted children.

After 'the Triumph', Celia, now a very powerful woman, threw herself into a number of projects with her usual restless energy, tourist projects for 'the workers' and foreigners other than Americans who, of course, were still welcome, but getting right away from the image of Cuba as a giant casino and whorehouse. She de-formalised diplomatic life (a reception at the Cuban Embassy in London was one of the most enjoyable, easy-going, laid-back and informal social events I have ever attended. With Fidel, she found time to bring up a number of adopted children: a daughter of a slain comrade whose last words were that Fidel look after his newborn daughter, and others who were baptised by a guerrilla priest in the Sierra Maestra when Celia and Fidel would stand in as godparents. Celia was a good mother, but Fidel found it easier to get on with youngsters.

Celia Sánchez died of lung cancer at 59. Fidel was bereft, and the reaction of the people reminds one of the mass mourning when Eva Peron died or, come to that, Princess Diana. She was obviously a very remarkable woman, highly competent and extremely courageous, but was she a saint? Did she have no faults, no defects? There is a tinge of hagiography to *One Day in December*. Another thing that bothered me is that, although the 'Bay of Pigs' is discussed, inexplicably there is no mention of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Perhaps these were the archives that were off-limits. Also, I would like to have known Celia's reaction to the executions organised by Guevara, after 'the Triumph'. At one stage, the guerrillas had said there would be no reprisals. How do you define reprisal? Were the executions necessary to dampen down an angry population's desire to settle scores and so prevent a bloodbath? In fact, there was remarkably little violence.

So, *One Day in December* has its faults, but if you are at all interested in the Cuban Revolution and its first 20 years up to 1980, when Celia died, it is well worth reading.

Nigel Potter

Union and Co-operation

Rob Harrison (editor), *People Over Capital – The co-operative alternative to capitalism*, New Internationalist Books, 2013, 208 pages, paperback ISBN 9781780261614, £9.99

This is a very timely co-operative publication. It was originally commissioned by the team at the multi-stakeholder co-operative, the Ethical Consumer Research Association, better known as the publishers of *Ethical Consumer* magazine. As the editor, Rob Harrison, points out in the introduction, the United Nations had the good sense to designate 2012 as the Year of Co-operatives. To mark it, the team at ECRA decided to launch an essay competition broadly on the theme of ‘is there a co-operative alternative to capitalism?’

The best contributions and a couple of complimentary pieces have made it into this book, published by worker co-operative New Internationalist. There is no doubt that co-operation in Britain needs some intellectual rigour if it is to grow and develop as a real force in the economy, let alone be in a position to challenge the existing economic consensus.

The UK co-operative economy is small but not insignificant and has grown continuously since the banking crisis of 2008, whilst the rest of the economy has at best been flat. There are just over six thousand co-ops which, to put it in perspective, is less than half of the number in the Italian province of Emilia-Romagna.

None the less, today co-ops are growing in every sector of the UK economy, some of which did not exist a few years ago. This has created a demographic issue for the sector. Most of us from the traditional bastions of retail and agriculture came into the co-op movement on the last wave of excitement in the late 1970s. Now we have a new, younger, more entrepreneurial group entering the movement. This book, it seems to me, is an attempt to create a space for that bifurcated movement to talk to itself!

So what do they have to say to one another? The scene is set by Robin Murray, probably best recognised for his work at the Institute of Development at Sussex University and as Director of Industry at the Greater London Council in the 1980s. Today, widely recognised as a social entrepreneur, he has high expectations for the co-operative sector. Despite the fact that some of his language is over the heads of many older co-operators, he does make a very simple point:

‘The primacy of a broad, liberal, co-operative education is a first priority.’

Frankly, as someone who reads a fair bit of academic writing, the text is

refreshing in the variety and passion of the writing. To give the book some shape, the essays are divided into six sections: History, Economics, Networking, Sustainability, Social Economy and Critical Perspectives. This range is impressive and puts a great weight of expectation on humble co-operation.

The 14 essays cover many issues that will be familiar to students of co-operation, such as replacing joint-stock companies with co-op structures, the subject of Steve Mandel's essay. Newer topics include co-operatives as a key contributor to an environmentally sustainable future, and their importance in equitable growth in the developing world. What is newer still is the role of co-operative relationships and ways of working that have come from open-source internet technologies. Nic Wistreich argues that the web is driven by non-market, co-operative forces. Personally, I am sceptical that this is the case, but would be more than happy to be proved wrong.

Raising capital has always been a co-operative challenge, and this is discussed in an interesting way by Adrianna Lovera who looks at alternative financial organisations in France and Italy. Her fear is that ethical financial institutions, rather than being the gravediggers of capitalism, may just be the institutions that help save it.

There is some refreshing criticism from Chris Tomlinson of Radical Routes of 'already existing co-operation'. One of the themes of *People Over Capital* is the need for more robust, honest debate between co-operators if we are to make any progress. We certainly need to be more honest about where we are and what the challenges are. That points to me to a new sort of politics. By that I don't mean simple party politics; something a lot more radical than the movement's historical links through the Co-op Party to the Labour Party, of which David Leigh is also critical.

In an afterword, there is a survey of the key issues for the movement and again the fact that co-operation needs to be taught comes out on top. This book is a welcome asset for co-operators in Britain and I hope it can become at least a biennial publication. And, as Dan Gregory says, the new social formation we need to build can act for the common good and be in our self-interest. As articulated by Robert Owen:

‘the union and co-operation of all for the benefit of each.’

One of *Ethical Consumer*'s campaigns is against Amazon, so this excellent book can be obtained direct from the New Internationalist web shop.

*Nick Matthews
Chair, Co-operatives UK*

Apostle of Peace

Gwyn Griffiths, *Henry Richard: Apostle of Peace and Welsh Patriot*, Francis Boutle Publishers, 2012, 350 pages, paperback ISBN 9781903427330, £14.99

Gwyn Griffiths wrote this book with much well-judged admiration of his subject, Henry Richard. Like Henry Richard, Gwyn Griffiths was born in the Mid-Wales village of Tregaron, Ceredigion, and he describes himself as having had a career in youth service, journalism, translation and broadcasting, as well as writing travel books and other books on Welsh history.

When a baby boy born in 1812 in a remote part of Mid-Wales dies 76 years later with tributes from the Prime Minister, W E Gladstone, and honours from several other European countries, one needs to know more about his origins. A surprising amount of scholarly detail is provided in this biography, which illuminates the values of the Victorian era.

Henry Richard's father, Ebenezer, was a 'Calvinistic Methodist Minister' celebrated throughout Wales for his successful sermons – success measured apparently by the number of sinners' souls saved. On the same page he is described as a Presbyterian minister – an apparent contradiction that may be explained by a measure of denominational convergence unfamiliar to some Methodists at least.

Henry's mother Mary, née Williams, came from a landowning family. Mary's brother, who was trained as a navigator, is described as a 'privateersman' in the service of a Liverpool company licensed to trade in slaves. If privateersman means, as I suspect, licensed pirate, it would explain how, being involved in the capture of a French vessel after Trafalgar, he later became captain of such a vessel and, no doubt, the personal beneficiary of some of its contents.

Such maternal family wealth, at a time when there was no state provision for education, explains how a good education in Welsh and English and, later, at a Congregational college in London was available for the captain's nephew. He became the minister of a London Congregational church where he developed wide interests in international affairs, particularly Britain's many wars of choice in the pursuit of empire.

After 25 years as a successful minister, Henry Richard dropped the title 'Reverend'. He had become a Liberal politician, an author and, at the age of 36 in association with Quakers, the pacifist secretary of the Peace Society. At the age of 56 he was elected the MP for Merthyr Tydfil and he

remained so elected, eventually unopposed, until his death 20 years later. In those 20 years he was a very effective back-bencher, held in high regard by many statesmen in Britain and abroad for his peace testimony and his advocacy of arbitration as an alternative to military action.

An example of Richard's involvement in international affairs is provided in Chapter 8 on the Paris Treaty, which was negotiated after the 1856 ceasefire which ended the Crimean war with Russia. It illustrates his and the Peace Society's concern that the Paris Treaty should contain some statement in support of arbitration of international disputes. The war had cost Britain £100 million and 20,000 lives. He persuaded the Peace Society to nominate a deputation to meet Lord Palmerston, then Prime Minister.

On 14 March 1856, the deputation presented Palmerston with an address, drafted by Henry Richard, proposing '... some system of international arbitration which may bring the great interests of nations within the cognisance of certain fixed rules of justice and right'. Henry Richard had been chosen to read the address even though Members of Parliament, including John Bright and Richard Cobden, were present. Palmerston received the address equivocally, indicating some support for impartial arbitration but he made no promise of action.

Richard's wish to meet the representatives of the countries which were parties drafting the Treaty lacked support from the Peace Society MPs, but he was supported by the elderly Quaker, Joseph Sturge, who responded

'Thou art right and if no one else will go with thee, I will; I am prepared to go not only to Paris but to Berlin, Vienna, Turin and even St Petersburg to see if we can't get access to the various sovereigns whose plenipotentiaries are sitting in Paris.'

A document was drawn up for the various nations and the two sailed for France on 20 March 1856 where they joined Charles Hindley, also of the Peace Society.

Their ambition to meet the French Emperor, Louis-Napoleon, was not realised, but they were assisted and received sympathetically by Lord Clarendon who had been Foreign Secretary since 1853. With Palmerston's support, Clarendon negotiated successfully with the Russians on the principle of conciliation. The result was that a clause stating that the plenipotentiaries in the name of their governments '... wish that states ... before appealing to arms ... have recourse to the good offices of a friendly power' was accepted by the Congress and appeared later as Protocol 23 of the Treaty of Paris. It was not a binding declaration and the French translation lacked consistency with the English, but it was an achievement nevertheless.

The Crimean war was one of several in which Richard was active in promoting conciliation or arbitration. On the civil war in the United States he took the, perhaps, opportunistic view that saving the union rather than abolishing slavery was the major issue, and not one that justified war. When a British ship, the *Trent*, carrying representatives of the Confederacy seeking diplomatic recognition for the South in Britain and France, was seized by the USS *San Jacinto*, Palmerston agreed to arbitration by Louis-Napoleon and the matter was resolved peacefully. British soldiers had already been dispatched to Canada, and a war in which Britain may have been allied with the South was averted.

Almost at the end of his career in Parliament in March 1886, Richard presented a resolution:

That in the opinion of this House, it is not just or expedient to embark in war, contract engagements involving grave engagements for the Nation, and add territories to the Empire without the knowledge and consent of Parliament.

In the penultimate chapter entitled ‘His last great speech’ the author records that Richard discussed the Royal Prerogative and listed the wars of his generation – Afghanistan, Burma, Syria, the Opium Wars, Persia, Japan¹, Southern Africa, and Egypt², adding that

‘... it seemed to be in the power of any petty officer in the service of the government or, indeed, of any private adventurer, to take over large territories, and saddle the duty of maintaining and defending them on the British people.’

Gladstone praised the speech, but the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, concerned about the practicalities of the resolution, appealed to Richard to withdraw it. Richard refused, and on the first vote, that the Speaker leave the Chair and the House go into division, Richard won by 112 votes to 108. When the House reconvened, the resolution became a substantive motion and it was defeated by 115 votes to 109 – saving the government from defeat.

Henry Richard throughout his career maintained an active interest in education, in the status of the Welsh language, and in the role of the non-Anglican denominational church schools and Sunday schools in Wales where there was 70 per cent literacy in the population before education was made compulsory by the 1870 Education Act. In the debate on that Education Bill, Richard argued that the government was proposing that everyone should pay for each other’s religious education. It was not a matter of whether or not children should receive religious education, he said, but rather how and by whom. He proposed that the State should

provide a literary and scientific education and let the churches and the religious denominations supplement that education by teaching religion. His amendment was defeated by 421 votes to 60. The Conservatives, largely Anglican, voted with the Liberal government.

In the centenary year of World War One, the debates on empire and wars of choice, on history and how it should be taught, on faith schools and other schools, on science education and six day creationism continue. Those debates are well illuminated by this carefully researched biography.

Christopher Gifford

Notes

1. After the death of a British traveller in 1863, the Japanese government agreed to apologise and pay £100 000 compensation. This was considered insufficient by an Admiral of the Fleet and, perhaps, by a local Consul, and without the authority of the government seven British warships sailed to Kagoshima and bombarded the city of 180,000 people to ‘a heap of ashes’.
2. In 1881, after insurrections in Cairo led by Col Ahmad Urabi and a riot in Alexandria, the British fleet was sent to the port where the defences were being strengthened by Urabi’s forces. Admiral Beauchamp-Seymour demanded the surrender of the city within three days. No reply was received, and from 11th July the city was bombarded for two days. Between the bombardment and the rioters, 2,000 Europeans were killed. The London government declared war, which was ratified by Parliament on 27th July. An army of 40,000 soldiers was dispatched and, after several battles, Urabi surrendered and Muhammed Tewfik Pasha’s administration was reinstated.

Labour’s Edifice

Nick Mansfield, *Buildings of the Labour Movement*, English Heritage Publishing, 2013, 164 pages, paperback ISBN 9781848021297, £30

In the summer of 2013, I was lucky enough to be invited to attend the Trades Union Congress in Bournemouth. Whilst there, I happened upon the excellent Bookmarks stall where Nick Mansfield was conducting a book signing. I wouldn’t normally have been aware of his publication, but even at a cursory glance it was clear it was well worth buying.

If you have a passing interest in recent history, this is a book you can dive into and enjoy reading for an hour or two. *Buildings of the Labour Movement* has a plethora of excellent photos, and some equally interesting written snapshots to support them. An extensive list of acknowledgements to the people who assisted Nick in this project gives an insight into the

unsung heroes of the Labour Movement; the very sort of people who were progressive and dynamic enough to ensure that these buildings were there to service the interests of varied organisations and their members.

The reader is transported through the Labour Movement, from its beginnings in the trade societies, through Owenism, Chartism, Socialism, the Labour Party and beyond. As if to underline that all ideas are revisited and remodelled, as well as buildings, there is a fascinating discussion of the Nonconformist Protestant movement and its influence on the British Labour Movement. It's amusing to see in an early form an idea that echoes, albeit in reverse, some of those of the reckless Conservative Education Minister, Michael Gove:

‘Sometimes, Nonconformist autodidacts built their own schools to promote an independent, politically aware radical education, free from the influence of the state and the Established Church.’

Photographs of a surviving People's School in Stalybridge, Greater Manchester, indicate that it is still in good condition. The people who undertake such conservation projects, depicted throughout *Buildings of the Labour Movement*, are themselves not dissimilar to Joseph Rayner Stevens, the Wesleyan Methodist minister and Chartist who founded the Stalybridge school in 1841. At one stage in his life, he was gaoled for eighteen months on account of ‘violent speeches’.

But it takes more than conception and execution to have such places become important. It requires continual work and planning from those at the outset and those who maintain the building and its work into the future. Millions of people throughout Britain worked to create the Labour Movement and its buildings by having a vision, not only of a political alternative, but also the practical application of the means to achieve such an alternative.

The vast amount of work that is required to realise some of these projects and ambitions can be seen more clearly, perhaps, by considering the achievements of Robert Owen. Not only did he have the political ideas, but also the means to attempt to implement them, at New Mills in Lanarkshire. His energies in and towards education exemplify the influences these ideas had through the services provided in these buildings. Who would have thought that his Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists slogan, ‘Educate! Educate! Educate!’, would be used by a Labour Party Prime Minister one hundred and sixty years later?

Often, buildings associated with major events in the history of the Labour Movement have been demolished, and linkages to the people

Tony Benn wrote in his introduction to *Buildings of the Labour Movement*:

'The premises erected by the oldest labour movement in the world are covered here in a fascinating survey ranging from the communal buildings of the early 19th-century political radicals, Owenites and Chartists, through Arts and Crafts influenced socialist structures of the late Victorian and Edwardian period to the grand union 'castles' of the mid-20th century.'

There are also chapters on the ubiquitous co-operative architecture, long forgotten socialist holiday camps, and those memorials associated with the hidden story of radical ex-servicemen and their remembrance of war dead. The countryside is also not forgotten with rural labour buildings, as well as the clubhouses of idealistic socialist cyclists. However, the book is not just about bricks and mortar, but uncovers the social history of the men and women who worked so hard locally to achieve their goals.

Though many buildings have been lost over the years, the book outlines the recent struggle for their preservation and details many which can still be visited.'

concerned and events have consequently become weaker. *Buildings of the Labour Movement* cites the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819, and 'The Round House', which opened on the anniversary of that event and, sadly, was demolished in 1986. Fortunately, the book also celebrates some buildings that have been maintained and are more than a surviving memory. The Free Trade Hall in Peter Street, Manchester, was built during the 1850s on the site of the Peterloo Massacre, to commemorate the repeal of the Corn Laws. The accompanying photograph provides an amazing visual treat, not only of that edifice but also of the ambition of the working people and their ability to fund and complete such projects. It makes one question precisely what we are doing today to celebrate our movement and what legacy we will be leaving for future generations.

It may be that we are now more concerned with the written presentation and preservation of our class's history, rather than the time, cost and effort entailed in property. One thing is certain; this book provides both a visual treat and some equally important historical nuggets. Its insights are informative and form an important addition to the history of the Labour Movement.

Dave Putson

A thinker of different description

Jim McGuigan (editor), *Raymond Williams on Culture and Society; Essential Writings*, Sage, 2014, 368 pages, hardback ISBN 9781849207706, £85, paperback ISBN 9781849207713, £29.99, eBook, £29.99

Given that Raymond Williams, ‘the greatest cultural theorist of Modern Britain’ as the editor of this volume, Jim McGuigan, boldly declares, produced thirty books, ninety book chapters, and more than two hundred scholarly articles, his work is not that easy to anthologise. This excellent selection of twenty ‘essential writings’ is based upon a fairly comprehensive and judicious selection of key features in Williams’s very extensive output. It attempts to be representative and developmental but also provides a logic and coherence for the volume as a whole which is designed to demonstrate the relevance of Williams for the Social Sciences, hence those selections which give prominence to his writings on communications theory, advertising and television. The idea of the intellectual as *engagé* is no longer fashionable in a culture of celebrity but, given the circumstances in which we now live, a reminder that one of the functions of the intellectual should be to have a public role is timely. This edition should serve as a reminder of this and introduce Williams to a whole generation for whom he is just a name, if that even. It is also of value for those who know the work but can take the opportunity to re-read a number of his essays in a convenient and well-presented format.

As well as being of general interest for those concerned with the relationship between culture and politics, the approach and rationale of the book are also entirely appropriate for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The book offers students the opportunity to engage first-hand with one of the major figures in British intellectual life of the twentieth century as he wrestles with and seeks to articulate cultural, social and political theories which now have, arguably, a fresh urgency. The advantage of this collection is that, although Williams’s prose can be occasionally prolix, for the most part it provides a ‘readerly’ experience with but little need for secondary explanation. The introduction outlines the principles of selection for the volume, gives a brief, but authoritative, overview of the significance of Williams’s work, and argues for its current value in the light of the depredations of neo-liberalism. Each selection is prefaced by a short, informative commentary which usefully places the chosen text in its context. The majority of the selections are extracted from material published in book form, but the inclusion of five pieces from journal

articles and occasional writings for a specific event is of particular value as they are less readily accessible.

Raymond Williams on Culture and Society will also help to re-situate the field of Cultural Studies within the disciplines and practices of history, social and cultural analysis, and politics as this ‘belonging’ has not always been apparent over the past two decades. Although, as McGuigan says, Williams remains a key figure behind much current academic work, his name is not familiar to most undergraduate students, partly because his work does not readily fit into bite-sized introductions to theory.

As the selections evidence, Williams’s work was always concerned with culture as a whole way of life and not just with what was commonly thought of as culture – the Arts, etc. His insistence on studying culture in its specific societal contexts and in terms of its historical transformations was a core feature of his theoretical concerns. Class and power were always at the centre of his cultural analysis, which always had a materialist basis, and this selection of essays amply demonstrates the point by reproducing essays, or excerpts from books, which set out the basis of Williams’s cultural materialism, which he defined as ‘the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production’. Arguably, this is his most important theoretical contribution to the study of culture and society, together with the innovative concepts of ‘structure of feeling’ and ‘mobile privatization’, the latter even more pertinent in our own time.

The final section of McGuigan’s Introduction is called ‘Twenty-first Century Williams’ and this mainly centres on three selections from *Towards 2000*, situated near the end of the volume, which show how remarkably prescient this book was. ‘Austerity’ politics, the Coalition government, the Eurozone crisis, News International, and the Occupy movement and related activities (UK Uncut, etc.) all suggest the need for the kind of analysis offered by Williams. There are few attempts of this kind, even today, which rigorously and systematically expose the ‘ideological abuse’ (Williams’s own phrase) perpetrated by neo-liberal capitalism with its ruthless exploitation of resources, people and environments in pursuit of profit. Intellectuals, we are told, have a duty ‘to speak truth to power’ but they seldom do. Williams, like Stuart Hall, was a rare exception in so far as he delineates precisely how power operates in the interests of self-serving élites. He was not content simply to expose and eviscerate, but also threads throughout *Towards 2000*, especially in the wonderful closing chapter, ‘Resources for a Journey of Hope’ (included in this volume), hints of alternative ways of thinking about work, the distribution of resources, care,

time, and education which might constitute a different kind of society organised on a human scale rather than on capital. Apart from its undoubted political value, *Towards 2000* is also a model of the kind of Cultural Studies – with its stress on historical transformations, the role and function of power, and the importance of the economy – which has almost ceased to exist, at least in many UK institutions.

I might have included the essay on ‘class’ from *Keywords*, but, otherwise, the range and representativeness of the selections make this a very important addition to work by, and about, Williams. The selection is organised chronologically and this makes sense as a kind of intellectual biography is being presented. With the recent sad death of that other great cultural theorist of modern Britain, Stuart Hall, whose life and legacy have been the subject of numerous tributes, this volume should form part of a renewed recognition of the importance of going beyond the ‘detached academicism’ of so much of what passes for the analysis of culture and society today.

Roger Bromley

A life in politics

Anthony Stanley Newens, *In Quest of a Fairer Society: My Life and Politics*, The Memoir Club, 396 pages, hardback ISBN 978184104595, £20, paperback ISBN 978184104564, £12

Stan Newens was born in Bethnal Green in 1930 within the sound of Bow Bells – a true cockney as he proudly tells us at the outset of this long and absorbing memoir. His parents were ‘respectable’ working class whose politics were, if anything, conservative. When Stan was nine years old the family moved out to North Weald, a village in Epping which later became a base for all his political activities.

Newens showed great persistence and personal courage throughout his long political life. He fought eight general elections, five of them successfully, and sat in the Westminster Parliament for 15 years from 1964 representing Epping and later the newly formed constituency of Harlow. He went on to win three elections for the European Parliament.

Although his schooling was somewhat disrupted during the early war years, Stan managed to pass his 11+ exam. He proved to be a diligent scholar and went on to win a place at University College London.

After graduation Stan was called up, but won the option to serve as a coalminer for four years rather than undertake the standard shorter military service because of his strong objection to the Korean War raging at the time.

His parents were very unhappy about this decision, together with his activities in the local Labour Party and publicly disassociated themselves from them.

Newens was used to hard work but found it difficult to adjust to the long shifts involving arduous and dangerous work underground. In addition, it was a problem for him to relate to the culture of the Staffordshire miners with whom he now worked. But he did eventually win their respect through the help he gave to some in cases of discrimination, hardship and difficulties over compensation claims. In fact, he once found himself leading an unofficial strike to the displeasure of both management and unions!

Stan still made time to participate in the activities of the Stoke-on-Trent Labour Party. It was in Stoke that he met and married his first wife, Anne, who participated in his political activities there and later. She died tragically young, in 1963, leaving Stan to care for their two young daughters.

After his mining service was completed Stan and Anne moved into a bungalow in North Weald near his old home. Newens obtained employment as a teacher at the Central School in Hackney, which later merged with a secondary school to become a comprehensive where he became Head of History and an active member of the National Union of Teachers. He became busy in the Epping Constituency and was active on national issues supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament and participated in the first CND march to Aldermaston. He joined the Movement for Colonial Freedom (later renamed Liberation) and subsequently became its chairman and, later, the president, succeeding its veteran founder Fenner Brockway.

Epping adopted Newens as its parliamentary candidate for the next general election. In 1964, under the fresh leadership of Harold Wilson, Labour won a slender majority, which included Stan Newens who captured Epping by a margin of 3,200 votes. Wilson called another election in 1966 when Newens was returned with an increased majority. After 1966, with a Labour majority of over 100 seats, the Left had much more freedom to organise; Stan was pleased to be able to join the new Tribune Group, which was formed under the chairmanship of Ian Mikardo to succeed the former Victory For Socialism group in which Stan had been very involved.

It was just before the 1966 election that Newens married his secretary, Sandra; she became his lifelong companion and fellow activist. (One suspects that the comprehensive details this book features, not only of election results but also of the many meetings in which he participated, are due to the application of her archival and secretarial skills.)

The second Wilson Government was soon beset with economic crises, which led to devaluation, cuts and deflation. Proposed legislation to curb trade unions resulted in enormous rows and split the Party in Parliament

and the country. In this situation it should have been no surprise that the Wilson Government was ejected from office at the 1970 election. Among the many Labour MPs who lost their seats was Stan Newens, whose defeat launched his Tory opponent, Norman Tebbit, on his political career!

After his defeat Stan returned to teaching at his comprehensive school in Hackney, and found it quite a struggle before he learnt how to cope with pupils who were now more unruly and behind in their studies. His stint was not to be for long, however, because he was soon adopted to fight the new seat of Harlow, which was formed from his old Epping constituency and where he now had his home. At the same time he became a Board member of the London Co-operative Society. As well as participating in its political activities, he supported initiatives over many years to improve the Co-op's trading performance.

The hardship, disruption and division induced by the Heath Government's measures met with determined resistance from the labour movement. This culminated in the miners' strike and the three-day-week, which forced Heath to call a general election in early 1974. Labour was returned as a minority government. Newens won the new seat as Labour and Co-operative candidate with a thumping 12,500 majority, which was further increased when Wilson went to the country again in October to win a working majority.

In 1976, Wilson unexpectedly resigned. The Parliamentary Labour Party elected James Callaghan as its new leader. But this did not herald the revival of industrial policy promoted by Tony Benn and others. In fact, Labour was overwhelmed by a financial crisis which impelled the Chancellor, Denis Healey, to seek help from the International Monetary Fund. In return, the Government was obliged to introduce cuts in public expenditure, deflation and a statutory prices and incomes policy. This culminated in the so-called 'winter of discontent' during which the government's majority evaporated and, on losing a vote of confidence in the Commons, Callaghan was forced to go to the country in April 1979. The Conservatives won a comfortable overall majority, but Newens managed to cling on in Harlow by the skin of his teeth.

Jim Callaghan resigned as party leader soon after the election defeat. The Labour Party was engaged in internal battles over accountability of representatives including new arrangements for the election of the leader involving all sections of the Party. But meantime the MPs pre-empted the decision by electing Michael Foot on the old system. The differences between left and right in the Party were played out in a fiercely fought contest for the deputy leadership between Healey and Benn. Healey won by the narrowest of margins. Newens was deeply unhappy about the acute divisions in the Party

and was therefore opposed to Benn's standing, but says that he felt impelled to give him his vote because he supported Benn's policies. Stan was consistently well to the left in the Party but his priority was always party unity.

The move of the Labour Party to the left led to the breakaway of the 'gang of four' MPs who went on to form the SDP, making an alliance with the Liberal Party which took many votes from Labour. They and the Tories benefited from the collapse of the Labour vote in 1983 and Stan Newens' Harlow seat was among the many Labour losses. However, his work as a parliamentarian was soon to resume.

Direct elections to the European Parliament were scheduled for the following year. Stan was under considerable pressure from party members to go forward as a candidate for the London Central Constituency. With reluctance he finally agreed to stand and went on to win the seat. He found himself in a very different world than the one to which he was accustomed in Westminster.

In Strasbourg Newens was part of the relatively small British Labour Group, which was itself part of the wider Socialist Group drawn from all the member states of the European Community. He did become Chair of the British Labour Group, but found the job quite frustrating because the deep antagonism between pro- and anti-marketeers made it very difficult for the Group to work together. He concentrated his activities on international work through the Parliament's Political Affairs Committee, drawing on his long experience with the Liberation organisation.

The 1994 Euro election was fought under a cloud. Just as the campaign was getting under way the Labour leader, John Smith, elected in place of Neil Kinnock after Labour's 1992 defeat, died suddenly and unexpectedly. In the event Labour swept in with an unprecedented 62 seats out of the 80 allocated to the UK. Stan Newens was happy to become a full member of the Parliament's Political Affairs Committee again and was appointed President of the Central American delegations. As such he was called upon to lead discussions with government leaders in the region and took every opportunity to raise specific questions about the application of human and civic rights in the countries concerned. He also took what opportunities arose to visit ancient sites and museums in the different areas and thus sustain his long-term interest in the making of history.

Stan Newens was not happy with the election of Tony Blair as the new leader of the Labour Party. He was particularly upset by Blair's proposal to replace Clause 4 of the party constitution, which was rightly seen as an attack on the Party's long held commitment to democratic public ownership. The European Parliamentary Labour Party, as it was now

called, was persuaded to vote, by a small majority, for the retention of Clause 4; this put them at odds with their Westminster colleagues. An advert was placed in *The Guardian* newspaper to announce the EPLP's stance. This happened to coincide with the visit of Blair to Brussels to meet with his MEPs. The party leadership was extremely cross and brought intense pressure to bear on the MEPs to change their minds.

By 1999, Newens had reached the conclusion that it was time for him to retire. This decision was reinforced by his unhappiness over the evolution of New Labour policies and, in particular, by the electoral system brought in by the government for the UK elections to the European Parliament that year. Candidates were to be elected by proportional representation in large multi-member constituencies with a closed party list system. They were chosen centrally and listed by party officials in order of preference. Those candidates out of favour with the leadership were liable to be – and in the event were – placed low on the lists and so unable to win a seat. Stan did not put his name forward. If he had chosen to stand, one may wonder where he might have been placed on the list: despite his long and loyal service, not very high, one suspects!

Ken Fleet

Hardback £20 + £3.25 post & packing, paperback £12 + £3 post & packing from the publisher, The Memoir Club, Dartmoor Suite, The Courtyard, Arya House, Langley Park, Durham DH7 9XE, tel. 0191 373 1739, email memoirclub@msn.com, or from the author, Stan Newens, The Leys, 18 Park Hill, Harlow, Essex, CM17 0AE, tel. 01279 420108, email stannewens@hotmail.com

On the long finger

Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, Beacon Press, 2013, hardback ISBN 9780807044759, price £22.50

The suffering of the Palestinian people cannot be wholly ascribed to the state of Israel: the United States must share no small portion of the responsibility, as it has aided and abetted Israel's expansionist strategy since its statehood in 1948. In fact the US, over many years, irrespective of president, from Truman to Obama, has, by its actions and inaction, obstructed the consummation of a lasting peace and settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians. Neither should the US be allowed to dissemble and take on the

mantle of ‘honest broker’, a sobriquet which it has assiduously cultivated over many years. It should be made to bear the burden of culpability in prolonging these negotiations and providing the means by which Israel has wreaked violence on the Palestinians. *Brokers of Deceit* takes three historic junctures of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and examines in detail the role of the United States in these events. These three key moments are Begin and Palestinian rights to self-determination and the defining of contextual autonomy in 1982; the Madrid-Washington negotiations and settlement growth, 1991-93; Barack Obama and Palestine, 2009-12.

The introduction dwells on what we might call the vocabulary of domination, arguing that the use of language such as the ‘peace process’, ‘security’, ‘honest broker’, ‘terrorism’, etc. has allowed the Western media to set the terms of the debate. A quotation from Edward Said makes this clear – it was not just the fact that in 1948 the Zionist forces had physically occupied most of Palestine enabling them to proclaim statehood for Israel. According to Said, the Zionists

‘had already won the political battle for Palestine in the international world in which ideas, representation, rhetoric and images were at issue.’

As George Orwell remarked, ‘if thought can corrupt language then language can corrupt thought’. Certainly, in 1948, the picture of the gallant infant state surrounded by aggressive Arab hordes ready to pounce at any moment was a powerful and successful myth. In actual fact the Arab governments’ intervention in 1948 was ambivalent, confused, with often ill-trained forces and lacking a clear command structure. Now, Israel of the 21st century is a nation armed to the teeth, with tremendous fire-power from drones to nuclear weaponry, much of it supplied by the United States and various friendly European governments. Whatever the reality in 1948, the present balance of armed force is uncontestedly weighted in favour of Israel.

From the inception of the state of Israel, the United States government has succumbed to the pressure of the powerful domestic Zionist lobby, happy to accede to its pressure given the usefulness in its Cold War rivalry, a potential threat to Arab nations stepping out of line. The US must have noted the lack of concrete support for the Palestinians from the Arab states and feels it can ride roughshod over the concept of simple justice for Palestinians. Apart from its duplicity, when it comes to actual negotiations, the enormous sums of money and equipment lavished on Israel by the US makes it by far the number one military state in the Middle East and the top beneficiary when it comes to the US aid budget. Without this mainly military largesse surely Israel would have come to reasonable terms with both its Arab neighbours

and the Palestinian people years ago? If the US is strong in giving both material and ideological support to Israel, it is not above giving paper assurances concerning 'legitimate Palestinian interests'. Jimmy Carter's use of the term brought rebuke from Menachem Begin, the new Israeli prime minister, in 1977, prior to the 1978 Camp David Accords. Carter, Sadat and Begin settled on the word 'autonomy' in the Accords. This allowed them to have three separate interpretations of the word, but it was the Israeli version that predominated over the years of tortuous negotiations and still defines Israeli policy even now. Begin's interpretation of 'self determination' stated that the Israelis were to have power over economic security and foreign affairs, and all other matters would be under an administrative council in what the Israelis referred to as 'Judea and Samaria' and 'Eretz Israel', what the world knows as the Occupied Territories.

It was this idea of autonomy that, in 1982, formed the basis for the Reagan Plan. This is the first of the three negotiating moments that the book explores. There were many factors that precipitated this initiative, but the timing corresponded with the replacement of the bellicose Haig with the more flexible Schultz, and the Israeli invasion and occupation of Beirut and much of Lebanon. The Reagan Plan's offer to the Palestinians was similar to the Begin 'autonomy' ruse, but it was introduced with the customary nod to the Palestinian's 'legitimate rights' and the desire to give them 'a just solution to their claims'. It would not mean an independent Palestine; but, together with Jordan, they would form a self-governing entity. However, the offer tabled remained as the Begin stipulations, and interpretation of 'autonomy' with 'self determination' took a much lower priority than Israel's perceived 'security' requirements. No doubt the Israelis reminded the US of an earlier commitment contained in a letter from President Gerald Ford, which undoubtedly had Kissinger's fingerprints all over it. This was in 1975 and is worth quoting at length: 'Should the US desire in the future to put forward proposals of their own, it will make every effort to co-ordinate with Israel its proposals with a view to refraining from putting forth proposals that Israel might consider unsatisfactory'. Needless to say, the Reagan Plan was rejected by the Palestinians in the immediate days following the defeat and subsequent flight of the Palestine Liberation Organisation from Beirut – one humiliation was enough.

Brokers of Deceit illustrates the dubiety of US assurances even during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the shelling of Beirut. The withdrawal of the PLO fighters from the city in 1982 was negotiated through the auspices of the US Ambassador to Lebanon, Phillip Habib. The PLO accepted the American assurances concerning the safety of Palestinian

refugees left in Beirut. The PLO went into exile in Tunis, hundreds of miles away from the epicentre of struggle. The final stroke of treachery was that, in spite of American assurances, the murderous militias attacked defenceless Sabra and Shatila, Palestinian refugee camps, with the active co-operation of the Israeli military.

Throughout the whole process the Americans succumbed, with little resistance, to the intransigent views of Begin and Shamir, namely that there would never be a self-determined Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories, that the right of return would be shelved, and the settlement building in the Occupied Territories would continue unabated. And this really continues to be the message to the present day. The Reagan initiative was totally unacceptable to the PLO, and it was not until 1991 and the Madrid conference that the parties came to the conference table again. Of course, the Israelis insisted that the Palestinians should not be a separate delegation but a part of the Jordanian contingent, as Palestinians did not exist and never had existed!

For Khalidi the second defining moment for America's role in Israeli-Palestine negotiations comes in 1991-93 at the Madrid-Washington conference. On this occasion he had first-hand experience of the negotiations, acting as an advisor to the Palestinian representatives. The Madrid meeting was co-sponsored by the USA and the USSR and both attended along with Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, who formed the main interlocutors present. The Americans, flushed by their recent victory over Iraq in the first Gulf War, together with the dissolution of their Cold War adversary into a patchwork of much weakened states, thought the factors were in place that could free up the Arab-Israel logjam. The PLO's fortunes were also at a low ebb, given its expulsion from Lebanon and its alignment with the losing side in the first Gulf War, and the resulting persecution of Palestinians throughout much of the Arab world, but particularly in the feudal Gulf States. The book charts in detail the negotiations, the perfidy of the US, the continuing intransigence of the Israelis about territory and autonomy, and the exasperation of the Palestinians, whose weakness was finally displayed when the Americans failed to honour their assurances on settlements and Jerusalem. The talks continued in Washington and reached breaking point, so much so that the leader of the Palestinian delegation, Abd al-Shafi, a distinguished Palestinian physician, flew to Tunis to persuade the PLO leadership and, in particular, Yasser Arafat to suspend negotiations. Arafat declined al-Shafi's advice, which opened the road for direct talks with the Israelis in Oslo.

The final example of US presidential obfuscation, concerning its self-appointed role as 'honest broker', is the present incumbent, Barack

Obama. On taking office there was a flurry of optimism that the new President would approach the diplomacy on the question of Palestine-Israel with fresh ideas and a more sympathetic view of Palestinian suffering. After all, did not this man have a Muslim name and African blood in his veins? These hopes were raised by his Cairo speech, but as the author remarks, having examined the text, there was much more on the European Jewish holocaust, for which no Palestinian can be blamed, than the travails of Palestinians. The nearly 100 years of ethnic cleansing, war and occupation visited on Palestinians presumably did not seem to count for much. The Obama administration, however, did mark a return to the usual diplomatic pretences of some degree of impartiality, unlike its predecessor. Under George W. Bush the settlements were overtly given the green light, as was territorial expansion well beyond the 1967 borders.

As a ‘daring move’, Obama appointed Senate majority leader George Mitchell, of Northern Ireland fame, as a presidential special envoy. Mitchell subsequently issued a report which, although incorporating some of the Bush ‘Road Map for Peace’, did call for a halt to settlement expansion. The Israelis accepted the report, with all the necessary ‘get out’ clauses and, as usual, totally ignored it. Mitchell wanted to involve the excluded Hamas in any negotiations, but given the strong ties of the extreme Likud Netanyahu Government to a ‘Tea Party’ led Republican party, a media dominated by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), and an equally supine Democratic party, this was rejected by Congress. In the White House as well, Mitchell’s innovations became a ‘victim of bureaucratic mugging’, the details of which *Brokers of Deceit* is at pains to elucidate. By early 2012, Obama’s initiatives, such as they were, with the old narrative of ‘terrorism’ and Israel’s ‘security’ to the fore, slipped into a low gear. Yet again US policy had led to the further prolonging of the Palestine-Israel dispute with the price paid largely in Palestinian blood.

Khalidi does not mention the ‘framework proposals’ being pedalled by John Kerry, the new Secretary of State, but given the sounds emanating from American and PLO sources for what has been described as a desperate attempt to break the logjam, it does not sound hopeful. *Haaretz* reports that a major dispute has broken out, provoked by the intention of the Israelis to hang on to the Jordan Valley. Abbas is rumoured to be ‘boiling mad’ at the American plans, compiled by John Allen, former commander of US forces in Afghanistan, which amount in Abbas’s eyes to ‘appeasement’, accusing the US of failing to be ‘a neutral mediator’ and the plan ‘worse than bad’. Right-wing members of Netanyahu’s coalition government are now coming out in public saying that Israeli occupation of the Valley is non-negotiable.

The thrust of *Brokers of Deceit* is to demystify the role of America and to strip away the veneer of impartiality to expose the real workings and thinking that has guided all American presidents from Truman to Obama. This is a task which Khalidi performs with forensic skill, using newly released documents and with personal involvement in some of the negotiations. Ironically, in his days at Chicago University, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the author was a neighbour of Barack Obama, who was at the Harvard Law School at the time and lived nearby. Their families socialised. This fact was picked up by the media when Obama attended a farewell dinner for Khalidi and the former was at pains to inform the press that his defence of Israel was ‘unshakeable’, and that he does not consult Khalidi on foreign affairs. One suspects that Obama’s views may have changed over the years, and not for the better!

John Daniels

(Information on the Kerry framework agreement was obtained from Global Research Newsletter, 19/12/2013, and the website of Jonathan Cook, who is a Nazareth-based journalist and winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism – See more at: <http://www.jonathan-cook.net/#sthash.dkuHEmx.dpuf>)

Must Labour Lose?

Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris, 2014, 1008 pages, paperback, ISBN 9781780767611, 16.99

‘A member of Parliament cannot be stupider than his constituents, for the more stupid he is, the more stupid they were to elect him.’ – Bertrand Russell

A *bon mot* germane to Sassoon’s reiterated pessimism over Socialism’s failures and future, which I insert to alleviate his neglect of the great man, adducing only (p.412; Dora gets in at p.392) Russell’s published letters and youthful equation of socialism with feminism.

Feminism gets an entire chapter, its most fascinating nugget of information being (p.419) that Alexandra Kollontai (if only she’d been Lenin’s successor!) was advocating separate women’s groups within the party, pre-figuring Labour Party lurches this way, surely congenial to the likes of Laurie Penny (‘Socialism without feminism, after all, is no Socialism worth having’).

First published in 1996, this is billed as ‘A New Edition, with substantial

new Preface by author,' a claim previously made for the 2010 reprint. No sign of that here. Any revision has been very lightly done. I fine-tooth-combed the Brobdingnagian bibliography – presbyopia aggravated by the deplorably minuscule typeface, – finding nothing new. An uncorrected absurd error (p.xxi, first paragraph of Introduction), misdating the French Revolution to 1889, gives the game away.

Talking of which, Zhou Enlai's 'It's too soon to say' quip is quoted (p. 406) without acknowledgement of recent revisionism re-assigning it from 1789 to 1968.

The 'substantial new Preface' consists of 22 pages mainly concerned with the economic downturn of 2007 and the Eurozone crisis. Sassoon's Eurocentrism was long ago anticipated by Ken Coates telling George Thayer (*The British Political Fringe*, 1965, p.138), that the British Labour movement was neglecting problems generated by the Common Market.

Spokesman readers will be struck by Sassoon's neglect of Coates' vast, admired corpus of writings. Absent from the Index, he only makes the Bibliography on the coat-tails of *Spokesman* pamphlets mentioned under the names of John Eaton and Tom Forester.

Sassoon, originally Cairene, is a London University Emeritus (a Latinism translated by Rupert Murdoch as 'deserving to be out') history professor, extensively published with some special attention to Italy, on which he can be seen interviewed on YouTube.

The first edition was showered with praise on all sides (naturally reproduced on the dust-jacket 'blurbs'), also winning the Deutscher Prize one year after his PhD supervisor, Eric Hobsbawm, took it for *Age of Extremes*; cf. my review-article at the ReadySteadyBook site on the latter's *How To Change The World*.

Sassoon deserved plaudits for his industry and multi-lingual research. Also for his style, laudably devoid of Newspeak academese, agreeably leavened with epigram and irony, especially on the antics of 1968 Parisian students (pps.388-92, a welcome contrast to the solemnities of Richard Wolin's 2010 *The Wind from the East*) which he rightly scorns as revolutionary play-acting, albeit his remarks on their artistic brethren strangely omit the Maoist films of Jean Luc Godard, aptly sub-titling his *Masculin-Féminin* 'The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola.'

Factual content is – as far as I can judge a volume comporting 1004 pages, 57 for Bibliography, and 2795 end-notes – accurate. Except where (p.757) Sassoon repeats the common canard that Marx never set down his vision of Socialism, thus reducing him to the level of Gerry Healey (Thayer, p.134): 'How do you see Socialism?' 'I don't care what happens after we take power.'

All I'm interested in is the Movement.' In fact, as Bertell Ollman's many books clarify, Marx intended a full exposition, being prevented by death.

No Ollman here, nor Erich Fromm's 1961 *Marx' Concept of Man*, symptoms of a major blind spot. As Paul Berman, reviewing the first edition (*New York Times*, August 3, 1997), observed: 'Sassoon has a tendency to shudder at the mention of the United States'. Completely ignored are early activists, e.g. Eugene Debs, Farrell Dobbs and Myra Tanner Weiss, Emma Goldman, Norman Thomas; later ones e.g. James P. Cannon and Angela Davis, plus such writers as Barbara Ehrenreich, Michael Harrington, and the *Partisan Review* crowd with which George Orwell was closely associated. America has not always been the land of Bush and Tea Partiers. Orwell frequently looked to it as the white hope of Socialism, a *Zeitgeist* well recreated in the Redford-Streisand film *The Way We Were*, and in Jonathan Lethem's 2014 novel *Dissident Gardens*.

Likewise Canada. Ken Coates once rebuked me for underestimating its contribution. The left-leaning New Democratic Party is the official Federal opposition. Its provincial counterparts are frequently in power. Separatist ambitions apart, the *Parti Québécois'* social liberalism is Euro-style. Calgary, where I live, is the country's most conservative city, yet has a tradition of protests, riots, and strikes going back to 1882. And the great 1919 Winnipeg strike was more violent and game-changing than the 1926 British General one.

Christian Socialism is largely by-passed. Not a word about R. H. Tawney; cf. Lawrence Goldman's new (2014) biography. Harold Wilson was fond of saying the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marx. Older *Spokesman* readers will remember Donald Soper and dear old Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean of Canterbury'.

Across the ideological divide, Sassoon has little time for Trotskyists. Having, along with Coates and John Daniels Senior, fallen in with – must have been something we ate – then out with Healy, I sympathise. The only British groupuscule noticed by Sassoon is Militant, though mercifully ignoring Ted Grant, a man who could like no other brighten up a room by leaving it. However, Sassoon is wrong to dismiss the tactic of 'Entryism' (some call it 'Entryitis') as 'absurd'. It makes more sense to agitate within the mass, union-based Labour Party than set up yet another ego-driven rump. The case was made years ago by Coates and Peter Jenkins, respectively in *Spokesman* pamphlets 52 & 59, followed by Leo Panitch (*Socialist Register* 14, 1959, pps 151-174), all ignored by Sassoon, as are the exchanges (also in *Socialist Register*) between Coates and David Widgery apropos the latter's 1976 *The Left in Britain: 1956-1968*; cf. the online list of *Spokesman* pamphlets for other relevant ones.

Sassoon is entitled to mock groupuscule futility. But not to ignore the one Trotskyist success, the Ceylonese Lanka Sama Samaja Party, led by N. M. Perera, whom I heard speak at one of the NALSO (National Association of Labour Student Organisations) 1950s Kessingland camps. Agreeable to note, as C. L. R. James, Perera was an ardent cricketer. Why were so many Commonwealth Trotskyists drawn to the game? Perhaps because Test Matches can last so long without any result.

Curiouser and curioser (as Alice said), Sassoon has practically nothing to say about the most exotic and extreme practical experiments. Excepting a passing tribute to its health care, nothing about Cuba and no mention of Castro. Nothing about Albania and Enver Hoxha, by far the most intriguing and readable of the East Europeans. Nothing on Cambodia, North Korea, or Vietnam.

Sassoon fair-mindedly allots some space to the enemy, e.g. considering the economic objections of Friedman, Hayek, and Patrick Minford. However, just as British Trotskyists side-step practical revolutionary problems, (How do you prepare the Working Class? Which Groupuscule will lead them on the barricades? How long before the warring sects start shooting each other?), Sassoon tends to evade the ideological opposition – I can hear Orwell tut-tutting – notably ignoring George Watson's frequently disquieting 1998 *The Lost Literature of Socialism*.

Pessimism pervades Sassoon's great enterprise. Often understandably. But remember, in 1960, after three successive Tory wins, Mark Adams and Richard Rose published (running to countless editions) their Penguin special *Must Labour Lose?* Well, we all know the answer to that.

Barry Baldwin

Non-violent social change

April Carter, Howard Clark and Michael Randle (eds.), *A Guide to Civil Resistance: A Bibliography of People Power and Nonviolent Protest, Volume One*, Green Print, an imprint of Merlin Press, in association with the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies, Coventry University, 2013, 258 pages, paperback ISBN 9781854251084, £10

The great achievement of this book is that it brings together an extraordinary wealth of experience in a manner that will be an eye-opener for most readers. If we talk about 'people power' or 'non-violent action', most people will immediately think of Gandhi or Martin Luther King, a

few will recall the end of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in the mid-1980s, and some others will remember or have heard of the Prague Spring nearly two decades earlier. Moreover, for most activists and others involved in peace action and movements for social change, there will be little knowledge of the theories of non-violent action and still less of the huge number of actions taken in so many countries and in such different circumstances across the world. Even recent events across the Middle East are rarely put in a broader historical context.

The book is subtitled *A Bibliography of People Power and Non-violent Protest*, but it is much more than this. Although the focus is on post-1945 movements, the opening section provides a wide-ranging introduction to the history and theoretical bases of non-violent action, as well as reflecting the most recent contributions to the literature and citing key reference works and internet sites. All the main sources have accounts of their content and relevance, frequently managing to get to the core of the books or articles in just a couple of sentences. What really comes across is the sheer range of examples contained within this bibliography. It is extraordinarily impressive, taking us through the campaigns in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, the earlier actions in late colonial Africa, campaigns of non-violent resistance in Latin America and the Middle East, and the growing number of ‘electoral revolutions’ since 2000, especially in post-Soviet states and Africa, and the burgeoning resistance to repression in various forms.

To my knowledge, when the first edition of this book was published seven years ago, it was the first time that a task such as this had been attempted with this degree of thoroughness. It was long overdue and turned out to be a really powerful antidote to the pervasive and negative outlook that believes that change will only come through violence.

This first volume* of a new edition brings that antidote even more up-to-date, and at a time when aspects of the Arab Awakening have powerfully reinforced the need to understand the potential for non-violent social change. By bringing together a remarkable range of writings, the authors have done a real service to all those people who seek positive social change through peaceful means.

Paul Rogers
Department of Peace Studies
Bradford University

*A second volume is in preparation which will further expand the first edition’s coverage of other primarily non-violent social movements, especially those that transcend a national context.

Roses for Noam

Noam Chomsky and Andre Vltchek, *On Western Terrorism: From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare*, Pluto Press, 2013, 192 pages, paperback ISBN 9780745333878, £11.50

In 2012, Noam Chomsky and Andre Vltchek met for a heart-to-heart on the state of the world as we know it. In doing so they sought to uncover some truths we might not be so familiar with. The result: *On Western Terrorism*.

A video clip of the first part of their meeting is available online*, part of a longer film from which the book is adapted. Vltchek's briefly noticeable sheaf of notes explains a lot. Not to diminish from the scope of the book, but knowing there was a little preparation for the discussion places these otherwise seemingly omniscient men back on the mortal plane with the rest of us.

The excerpt is worth a watch. Their conversation reveals many things that are both factually and emotionally difficult to process by reading alone. Hearing the authors' voices, you can begin to appreciate what they describe on a more human level. Vltchek is forthright, often framing the current point with detailed historical/political reports, which plays off well against Chomsky's equally stirring but occasionally world-weary insights.

On Western Terrorism's general revelations can be summed up by two of the chapter themes: 'Concealing the Crimes of the West' and 'Propaganda and the Media'. The authors explore the selective coverage of world events by Western media, with news angled in such a way as to support Western political ends, and which neglects to show the suffering of nations deemed to be of lesser importance. Time and again they return to the concept of 'Unpeople' – those who do not matter, about whom we simply do not think. Amazingly, entire nations can be 'Unpeople', which explains, in part, how devastating conflicts so often go unreported in the mainstream. (Germany's genocidal past in Namibia; estimates of 6-10 million killed in DR Congo by invisible governmental forces over the past few years; and other chilling accounts.) They are not important to the West.

Consequently, *On Western Terrorism* shows the great fallacy in complacency, believing that our media is so much more liberal than that in other parts of the world. Chomsky and Vltchek challenge misconceptions on the freedom of expression in countries such as China, and share their experiences of lower levels of media censorship there than in the UK and US – truly thought-provoking, given the common portrayals of China blocking access to 'subversive' websites. However, based on his

experiences growing up in Eastern Europe, Vltchek goes on to suggest that living under media censorship actually encourages people to better inform themselves, searching for truth outside of official sources.

Going by the authors' example, the solution appears to be a 'question everything' approach. The real trick is to not be sucked in by hysteria and speculation. The bounty of information online, though less regulated than the news in some cases, has its own snares. Chomsky's observations on enlightenment via the internet are particularly biting:

'... you have major cults developing which just draw people away from the real issues, from serious activism. I mean, take the huge 9/11 truth movement – its major impact has been to draw off energy from trying to do anything about the problems that have arisen. It's easier to sit at the internet and to work through some technical article you don't understand about whether there are nanothermite traces found in the building WTC-7. It's easier to do that than organizing protests against the Iraq War – a lot easier.'

'Knowledge', apparently, isn't everything; in fact, it seems our ways of attaining it today can prove counter-intuitive to achieving anything at all.

The overarching suspicion of Western media is not the only recurring topic: some prominent others include the cover-up of US-sponsored massacres, especially in Central and South America; the past and present political darlings of the US, and the fickleness of this favouritism; and the US and UK's previous support of Islamic extremism in the Middle East (a bid to quell secular nationalism). Despite this deluge, the authors are cautiously optimistic about recent developments in some parts of the world, in the aftermath of Western brutality. Regarding the past traumas of Central and South America, both authors express hope for the future, describing the great advances in healthcare made in countries like Bolivia, and the positive developments for freedom of political expression seen in Chile in recent times. Their belief that leaders in this part of the world are ready now to commit to the needs of their people is a welcome high note, amongst the miserable tales of US-sponsored coups, death squads, and societies left impoverished decades after conflict.

Very intriguing suggestions are made as to why some countries produce more successful propaganda than others. American material has tended to come out on top, leaving even the other super powers in the dust. Vltchek comments on the failures of China and the Soviet Union in creating campaigns anywhere near as effective, pointing to societal and political differences which somehow prevented their propaganda from having the desired effect. Chomsky notes the relatively more successful achievements of Nazi Germany, explaining how it was influenced by the apparently

‘American’ ideologies of colonialism and mass production.

On the subject of colonialism, the authors consider how its lingering shadow endures in both politics and propaganda alike. The mindset that it was purely beneficial for the countries invaded is, apparently, still encountered, and for those so inclined it may influence the way current affairs in previously colonised countries are interpreted. Vltchek comes down hard on the West’s favouritism towards India and criticism of China, the latter of which he feels the more successful. He mentions Tibet, how it ‘never leaves the pages of the newspapers’, whereas the similarly turbulent relationship between India and Kashmir is overlooked. For him, India has not necessarily earned this position of esteem on its own merit, and the old colonial ties seek to strangle those yet unconquered. Perhaps we have not come as far as we like to think.

It is easy to see their tremendous respect for one another’s opinion. Vltchek’s slightly fawning introduction to the book also speaks for their personal rapport; Professor Chomsky is a man who ‘also loves roses’, don’t you know? Some lighter moments in the conversation – though few and far between – even allow a hint of dark humour to emerge. If only we could witness the delivery of Chomsky’s particular wry remarks (e.g. on conspiracy theorists: ‘So maybe a third of the population thinks we are governed by homicidal maniacs who want to murder us all. Well, ok, now go back to work, you can’t do anything about it so it’s out of my hands’).

Aside from the other authors and activists mentioned in brief, it might have been useful to see a list of more detailed supporting citations, though no doubt it would have stilted the discussion. Their dialogue evidently draws on many years’ personal experience all over the world, but the kind of scrutiny they encourage surely requires going beyond just their say-so. Or, perhaps, that is, in fact, our cue to corroborate their information ourselves. Whatever you make of it, *On Western Terrorism* is an immersive read, and an incentive to engage more critically with international concerns.

Nicole Morris

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pee06rnp-s0>

Thirty years on

Robert Green, *A Thorn in Their Side*, John Blake, 2013, 414 pages, paperback ISBN 9781782194286, £7.99

Hilda Murrell died a horrible death. Her partially clothed body was found in a remote copse several miles outside Shrewsbury on Saturday 24 March

1984. She had been missing since the preceding Wednesday. There were stab wounds to the arm and abdomen, and her collar-bone was broken. But the primary cause of her death was recorded as hypothermia. Then came 'penetrating wounds to the abdomen and multiple bruises to the face'. The words 'DECEASED WAS KILLED UNLAWFULLY' are underlined on her death certificate. She had been left to die a lingering, painful and lonely death.

Hilda had much to live for. At 78 years of age, she was in full cry against the folly of installing 'theatre' nuclear weapons at Greenham Common and elsewhere whilst also preparing a detailed submission to the public inquiry into the planned Sizewell B pressurized water reactor (PWR). In 1982, she had opposed Mrs Thatcher's war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands/Malvinas. She was busy, resolute and sociable, whilst also maintaining her large house and gardens on the outskirts of Shrewsbury.

Her next of kin was Robert Green, retired Royal Navy Commander turned Thatcher to the roofs of Dorset. Robert was very close to his spinster aunt. Later, he served for 20 years in the Royal Navy, beginning in 1962, as a Fleet Air Arm observer/bombardier-navigator flying in Buccaneer nuclear strike aircraft and anti-submarine helicopters. Later, he was promoted to the senior position of Staff Officer (Intelligence) to the Commander-in-Chief Fleet. In 1981, he took voluntary redundancy, but was not released from the Navy until the Falklands War was over, in 1982.

Hilda's work on Sizewell was to do with acute environmental threats associated with the disposal of nuclear waste. However, she was being advised by Don Arnott, a retired nuclear scientist, who had discovered a fundamental flaw in the safety system of the PWR which had shown itself in the nuclear near-disaster at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979. Robert Green read his aunt's written submission to the Sizewell Inquiry after her death.

Green's Naval career culminated with the Falklands War, where he was at the heart of Naval Intelligence. He writes:

'... Back on 2 April 1982, with intelligence reports of the Argentine invasion pouring in, I had worked non-stop for 36 hours. My intelligence team was therefore reorganised and expanded into a four-watch system, in addition to the separate cell providing 24-hour intelligence support on Soviet deployments.'

I was watching TV at home on 2 May when I learned HMS *Conqueror* had torpedoed the *Belgrano* [an Argentinian warship with more than a thousand crew]. From my previous time on watch, I knew the cruiser was being trailed by *Conqueror*, which was not allowed to attack it while it stayed outside the exclusion zone, but then the submarine was secretly ordered to attack. I immediately realised the implications, and that repercussions would be serious.'

The repercussions were, indeed, very serious. Some 321 crew, many of whom were young sea cadets, and two civilians lost their lives in what has been described as the worst British maritime war crime of modern times. Tentative peace plans were aborted, so that many more lives were to be lost in the conflict.

Robert Green puts straight the record of his non-involvement in the fateful decision to sink the *Belgrano*. For the incorrect impression that he was instrumental in the sinking of the *Belgrano* has endured, ever since Tam Dalyell MP told the House of Commons, on 20 December 1984,

‘... Commander Rob Green was, I am told, the person who physically sent the signal to *Conqueror* that sank the *Belgrano* ...’

Not so. No wonder Rob Green’s ‘heart sank’ when he saw Dalyell’s words, spoken under Parliamentary privilege, reported in the newspapers. This muddle has echoed down the decades. For two years since the Falklands War in 1982, Dalyell had been pursuing a courageous Parliamentary campaign to expose the authentic political responsibility for the sinking of the *Belgrano*, which was sailing away from the Falklands at the time it was sunk. In this work, Dalyell was assisted by information and tip-offs from his extensive network of contacts.

We need to rewind a little. On 22 March 1984, Clive Ponting, a 37-year-old senior civil servant in the Ministry of Defence, was instructed to prepare a comprehensive review of the situation about the sinking of the *Belgrano*, ‘to be quite sure that there is not a Watergate in this somewhere’, according to Defence Minister, Michael Heseltine. Heseltine’s subsequent reply to Dalyell’s latest questions ignored a draft proposed by Ponting with specific answers, and instead stonewalled. According to Green,

‘Ponting was appalled by this deliberate attempt to conceal information showing that Ministers had misled Parliament for the previous two years.’

Ponting went on the offensive and anonymously suggested to Dalyell questions he should put to the Government. Prime Minister Thatcher and Heseltine were desperate to track down the source of these latest leaks to Dalyell. Eventually, in August 1984, Ponting was identified as the source by chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Sir Anthony Kershaw. Ponting was put on trial under the Official Secrets Act and acquitted by the jury. This sensational, democratic verdict saw Michael Heseltine storming off the set of Channel 4 News, watched by a bemused Jon Snow, when Heseltine saw that Ponting was also in the studio.

The timeline of *Belgrano* revelations overlaps quite closely with that of

Hilda Murrell's abduction and murder. She disappeared on 21 March 1984, the day before Heseltine instructed Ponting to protect him from a 'Watergate', alluding to US President Nixon's authorisation of the break-in at the Watergate office complex in Washington DC in 1972 to spy on his Democratic Party rivals. Clearly, there was a febrile atmosphere in the inner councils of the Thatcher Government at the time.

Who killed Hilda Murrell and why? In May 2005, 21 years after the event, Andrew George was convicted of her abduction and murder. He was a 16-year-old living in a care home in Shrewsbury at the time. DNA evidence, thrown up in the cold case review, linked him to events at Ravenscroft, Hilda's house, on 21 March 1984. He does not dispute that he was in her house at about the time she was abducted, but says his opportunistic burglary went wrong when he encountered other people there who threatened him with guns.

Robert Green is convinced Andrew George is not his Aunt's killer, and urges his release from prison, where Green has visited him. Green adduces a wealth of evidence that others were involved in Hilda's death. DNA from under Hilda's fingernails indicate she struggled with a different person. And how did she reach the copse where she was eventually found? Andrew George couldn't drive, although Hilda's car was found crashed several hundred yards from the copse, which lay across a muddy, exposed field. Most significantly, perhaps, Hilda's body was not spotted by the owner of the copse when he was inspecting his trees there the day after she was abducted. This indicates she wasn't taken directly to the copse on the Wednesday of her abduction. Police pictures of her frail, prone body amongst the widely spaced trees make it clear that it would be impossible to miss her whilst counting trees in the copse if, indeed, her body was there at that time on the Thursday. If she wasn't there then, as seems highly likely, where was she?

Green speculates that she was abducted and killed by persons acting on behalf of the British State. According to Green, the motive for entering her property may have been to do with her preparations for the Sizewell B Public Inquiry, or it may be to do with his own close involvement in the prosecution of the Falklands War. Did she disturb those searching her house for relevant documents? Did Andrew George do the same? Such coincidences seem unlikely, but Green poses a long series of unanswered questions. Serious shortcomings in police investigations of the abduction and murder compound the picture.

This is a deeply disturbing book. Not only because of the crimes done to Hilda Murrell, but also because of the enduring harassment of Rob

Green and his second wife, Dr Kate Dewes, over many years as they try to establish the truth about Hilda's death. They have enlisted high-level political support in New Zealand, where they live, but their post continues to be opened, and intruders enter their house, to cite only two instances of unwarranted surveillance. Green writes of New Zealand and the United Kingdom:

'The reality is that, in both countries, the security service has free rein regarding surveillance and any other measures it feels are needed to protect the State – because any parliamentary legislation is currently unenforceable.'

This was written before Edward Snowden's revelations about super snooping by the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and the US National Security Agency (see *Spokesman 121*).

Thirty years on, justice for Hilda Murrell is long overdue.

Tony Simpson

www.hildamurrell.org

Reviving English Radicalism

Roger Fieldhouse & Richard Taylor (editors), *E. P. Thompson and English Radicalism*, Manchester University Press, 2014, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9780719088216, £65

A major book on Edward Thompson, who died 20 years ago, is an important reminder of the loss of English radicalism and the need to revive it. Roger Fieldhouse and Richard Taylor, who were professors of Adult and Continuing Education, respectively at Exeter and Cambridge, have edited this book and each contributed a chapter along with seven other scholars with close connections to Edward Thompson's work. Edward was a polymath – poet and literary critic, adult educator, historian, political activist, peace campaigner and, as a young man in the 1939-45 war, a very brave tank commander. I knew him well, in all his many activities from his school days up to the year before he died, at the age of 69.

Edward's private papers are held by the Bodleian Library in Oxford and are embargoed for fifty years, but his own voluminous public writings have given the authors assembled here plenty of material for their studies. In their short introduction the editors review Edward's many engagements as teacher, writer, political activist and peace campaigner, and emphasise his huge influence resulting from the publication, in 1963, of his *The*

Making of the English Working Class. They note the absence of the middle class and of women from his story, but recognise the

‘moral passion and historical vision ... that underlie the presently inchoate movements of opposition to the dysfunctional and immoral capitalism of the twenty-first century.’

There are important lessons here for today in Edward’s life’s work.

The first chapter by Roger Fieldhouse discusses Edward’s fourteen years as an adult education lecturer for Leeds University Extramural Department and the WEA (Workers’ Educational Association) from 1948, mainly in three-year weekly evening classes in West Yorkshire. Edward recognised at once that these students had their own ideas from their own experience as well as their reading. I have to say that for my own WEA and extramural classes, when I went north to Sheffield, I learnt much from Edward about how he involved students as participants in the study of social and historical issues, and not just as recipients of lectures followed by discussion of the lecture. In 1955, Edward published *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, which thrilled me, having been brought up by my father as a devoted admirer of Morris and all he stood for. In the next chapter on *The Making of the English Working Class*, discussed by David Goodway, who went from Leeds Extramural Department to Cambridge, Edward established his firm imprint on Social History, that it should be understood from below, from the people themselves, not as a fixed class like a caste, which Edward understood well from his father’s experience in India, but as people in movement, ‘in the making’. The next chapter, by Teodor Kodicek, examines Edward’s Marxist theory of history and his response to Gramsci, who greatly attracted Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, who worked with Edward. They said from studying Gramsci, that ‘British atavism’ was ‘permanently trapped in a retrogressive social stasis’. Edward regarded this as nonsense and continued to believe in the capacity of the English working class to build a new society from their sense of community to form a ‘moral economy’.

After Leeds, Edward went to the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick University, and edited the highly critical book, *Warwick University Limited*, which has just been republished by Spokesman with a new introduction by Hugo Radice. In one chapter, Edward decries some Warwick lecturers as ‘Academicus Superciliosus’, in a passage which is also reproduced in *E P Thompson and English Radicalism*.

The chapter on ‘The uses of Literature: Thompson as Writer, Reader and Critic’, by Luke Spence, another Leeds Extramural lecturer, I found

particularly interesting, partly because I never discussed Edward's poetry with him, but mainly because of Spence's careful analysis of the words Edward uses to describe the ways in which we think – in concepts, categories, allusions, rationale, evidence, stories and tales, theories and relations. This is taken up again, in some excerpts from Edward's writing, quoted at the end of the book, and by Bryan Palmer from Canada in a final chapter on 'Thompson's School of Awkwardness'. Edward has to be taken *sui generis*. William Blake, who Edward admired beyond all other writers, was his model. I have heard Edward in a lecture reciting 'Where mercy, love and pity dwell' with tears in his eyes. As Spence concludes his essay on Edward,

'He did not think of himself as a different sort of writer when he was practising social history or literary criticism, or political polemics – or for that matter preparing teaching notes or making poems. All writing was a means of engaging with oneself and other people.'

As things stand, the force of his example is not likely to diminish.

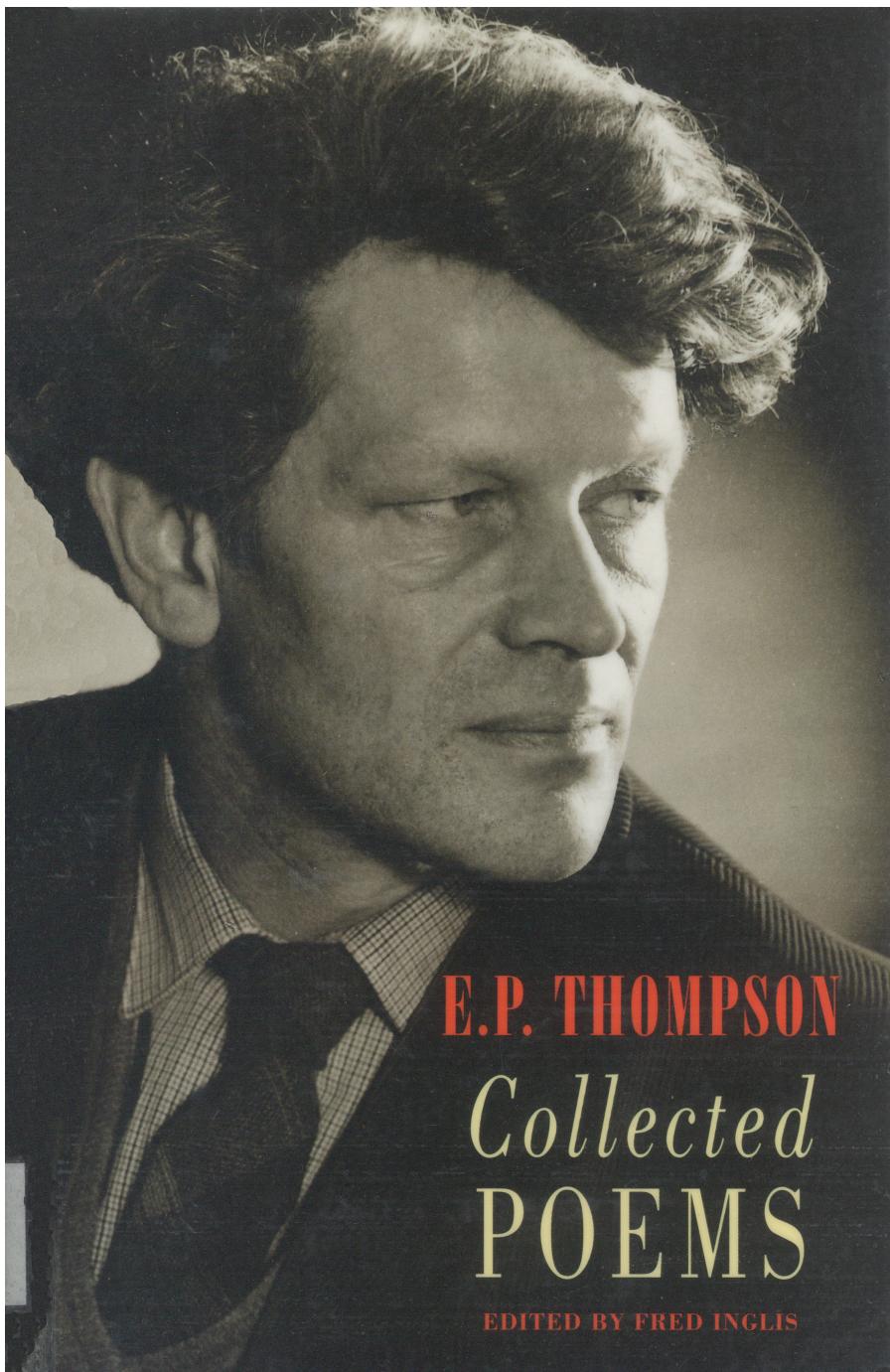
The Second Part of this book is called 'Policy, Theory and Peace Campaigns' and begins with an essay on 'Thompson and Socialist Humanism' by Kate Soper, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy in London and one-time chair of European Nuclear Disarmament in Britain. For Edward, Kate Soper writes,

'Socialist Humanism always meant a libertarian Communism and positive neutralism, that was as opposed to Stalinism in Soviet dominated Europe as it was to "NATopolitanism" in Western Europe.'

Much of this chapter is concerned with Edward's violent opposition to the deadening effects of Althusser's structuralism and shows Edward drawing on Sartre for support for a more positive view of human emancipation, but still revealing some pessimism about possible united action for good causes. Edward noticeably absented himself from the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, which many of those he had associated with in the New Left were engaged in. The article which follows Kate Soper's on 'Thompson's concept of class' by Nina Power, another academic philosopher engaged in political issues and protests, reviews the concept of class. For Edward, class is not a fixed and unchanging condition, but something that is always on the move. Class struggles are very real, and recognising them is the only way of understanding what is happening in societies today, as much as in the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Centuries, but they are full of changing motions.

After these chapters on theory, it is something of a relief to follow in the next two chapters Edward's actual activities in helping to form the New Left, written up by Michael Newman, another Emeritus Professor from London, and in the peace movements of CND and END, where one of the editors, Richard Taylor, has contributed the essay. Edward and I left the Communist Party in 1956-7, along with many others, when Khrushchev made his famous denunciation of Stalin and Soviet forces invaded Hungary. Edward and John Saville launched a new journal, *The Reasoner*, which later became *The New Reasoner*. Almost at the same time a group of staff and students at Oxford, led by Charles Taylor and Raphael Samuel, launched another post-Communist, left wing magazine, *University and Left Review* (ULR). I joined the editorial board of the *New Reasoner* and was then invited also onto the board of ULR. At the end of 1959, it was agreed that the two journals should be merged to form *New Left Review*. As a member of both boards, I was asked to chair the merger discussions and received many criticisms from Ralph Samuel of 'all these Quaker compromises!' A merger was in the end agreed, with Edward, John Saville, Charles Taylor and Ralph Samuel on the new board, together with Ralph Miliband, Gabriel Pearson, Malcolm MacEwan, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Ken Alexander and John Hughes. Stuart Hall from Jamaica and ULR was chosen as our editor.

We established a coffee house run by Ralph Samuel in Soho, formed 45 New Left clubs throughout the UK, with over 3,000 members, and published a number of very interesting articles on social and economic developments in the UK and world wide. I was sent to Yugoslavia to report on what was happening there and then asked to research the concentration of ownership in British industry. It was not, however, a happy organisation. Edward was at odds with Stuart. More widely, the problem was our relationship with the Labour Party. Some of us were Labour Party members. Edward and several others were not, and supported left-leaning candidates who opposed Labour candidates in elections. Moreover, the company got seriously into debt. In 1960, Edward resigned the chair and John Saville took over, but Edward returned for a year until Stuart Hall resigned as editor. Edward then handed over to Perry Anderson, Ralph Samuel and Dennis Butt. The financial problems were met by Perry, who recruited Robin Blackburn as the new editor. But the gap between Edward's thinking and that of those in the Labour Party opened more widely when Edward criticised Raymond Williams and began again to talk about the conditions for revolution in the rising revolt of the students in the 1960s in France and spreading in the US and the UK.



E.P. THOMPSON

*Collected
POEMS*

EDITED BY FRED INGLIS

The chapter by Richard Taylor on ‘Thompson and the Peace Movement’ describes Edward’s activities in CND and END when Ken Coates and I were most closely in touch with Edward, not that we agreed always with him. Edward saw the peace movement as only part of a much wider struggle for social change. In 1989, Ken Coates became a Labour member of the European Parliament, and saw it as a potential instrument for improving human rights, employment, and the general condition of old and poor people, which Edward regarded as too superficial. Edward was not interested in Ken’s activities with Bertrand Russell, and was very doubtful about all this association with Old Labour bodies. Although Edward made great speeches at the END Conventions in different European cities in the 1980s, relations between Edward and Ken were distinctly strained. Taylor quotes a letter from Edward to me in 1982, asking me to persuade Ken to ‘calm down’. Taylor does not mention a visit made by Edward to see me and Royden Harrison, in 1982, to talk with us about involving the youth more effectively in political change. At that meeting at Royden’s house, Edward had queried, *en passant*, why the young were so taken with Che Guevara? Royden had replied, ‘He was a romantic revolutionary!’ and added, ‘And a failure, Edward! You should understand!’ Edward left the house, furiously angry. After he left, I told Royden that I thought that he had been rather unkind. Royden replied that ‘the cause sometimes required one to be unkind’. I doubt if it helped the cause.

At one of the last END Conventions, held in Helsinki, Edward and I went together. Dorothy, Edward’s wife, asked me to take care of Edward on the journey to Tallinn in Estonia, where the Convention was to be continued. It was a very happy time for me, advising Edward about his speech, and the last time I saw him before his death. He was only 69 when he died, and as I look back on his life, and consider the difficult times through which we are now living, I realise how much we need the Thompson charisma, his marvellous command of language, his historical understanding and, above all, his faith in what ordinary human beings can do.

Michael Barratt Brown

World War One Watch

John Gittings

In this centenary of the First World War, no one should be surprised that Michael Gove has been quick to let us know how we should learn from its history ‘in the right way’. His verdict in the *Daily Mail* (2 January) has at least the merit of simplicity. World War One may have been a horrific war but it was also a Just War. General Haig was not a butcher but a patriotic leader ‘grappling honestly with the complexities of industrial warfare’. And we should not be taken in by the ‘Left-wing’ views of some academics – or by *Oh What A Lovely War* and *Blackadder*.

Whether or not we accept the theory of Just War, it would be intriguing to debate its meaning here with Gove, for it is probably a more complex doctrine than he realises. To have a ‘just cause’ (in this case, Germany’s invasion of Belgium and France) is not enough. There are other criteria to be met, including crucially the ‘probability of success’ and ‘proportionality’, meaning that there should be a reasonable timescale for success, and that the benefits of waging a war should outweigh the harm it will do. Does a four year war and the deaths of at least ten million, plus other consequential losses such as the vast number of those seriously wounded, the suffering of civilian populations, the epidemics which ensued etc. really meet these standards?

Yet we should be less concerned with Michael Gove (what else did we expect him to say?) than with the tide of post-revisionist analysis along much the same lines which has appeared in the media – particularly in the BBC’s output — so far. Presentation has been tilted towards assigning all, or almost all, blame to Germany. As stated by Jeremy Paxman at the start of his four-part series,

‘In 1914 Britain faced its greatest threat for nearly a thousand years ... Kaiser William aimed to dominate all of Europe by invading both France and Russia. He also had his eyes on a chunk of the British empire.’

The confused military and diplomatic build-up – on all sides – to the war has been brilliantly charted in two recent histories – by Christopher Clark (*The Sleepwalkers*) and Sean McMeekin (*July 1914: Countdown to War*), but their view that the great powers blundered into war, and that there was no German master-plan, has hardly been heard on the BBC. There has been no attempt to delineate the framework of imperialist rivalry over the preceding years which created the climate for war. The argument for or

against Britain's decision to enter the war is being put in narrow terms as I write by two right-wing historians: Max Hastings who believes that Britain had no alternative but to take part in this 'necessary war', and Niall Ferguson who argues that Britain should have stood aside, perhaps to intervene more effectively at a later stage.

An online BBC series of guides to the war (under the title 'iWonder') has been launched to clear up what it calls 'common misperceptions'. The first, by military historian Dan Snow, argues against 'the widely held view that the majority of soldiers died in the trenches'. This is wrong, he says: actually 88 per cent of British soldiers survived 'to return home and rejoin their families'. Yet Snow's statistics are suspect. It is true that the death rate among all British servicemen during the war was about one in ten, but that includes everyone who served everywhere, not only those in the trenches. He also minimises the large number of soldiers who were seriously wounded.

Another allegedly myth-busting article is written by Professor Gary Sheffield, the historian (much admired by Michael Gove) who claims that history has misjudged the generals, and especially General Haig. Sheffield 'partially acquits' Haig of the charge that he lost too many lives, with the argument that 'win or lose, Western Front battles were costly in human life'. And he insists it is wrong to say that Haig never won an offensive: didn't he win the last battle of the war?

These are early days in what will be four years of remembering this terrible war. The BBC promises 130 TV programmes spanning 2,500 hours. Let us hope for more balanced argument and judgement to come.

www.johngittings.com

With grateful acknowledgments to Oxford CND.

John Gittings is the author of The Glorious Art of Peace: From the Iliad to Iraq, Oxford University Press (see Spokesman 118, 120).