

## Onward and Upward

**Benjamin Kohlmann (ed.), *Edward Upward and Left-Wing Literary Culture in Britain*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 228 pages, hardback ISBN 9781409450603, £60.00**

‘Everybody liked to talk about the “problems” of being a writer, and most of the “problems” came from being in the Communist Party in the first place.’

Thus Doris Lessing (quoted by Christopher Hitchens, ‘Edward Upward: The Captive Mind’ in *The Atlantic*, May 2009), herself belonging to a Communist Party of Great Britain’s (CPGB) writers’ group, something that Upward oddly complained did not exist. The Party in fact provided a rich cultural menu (I cherish memories of the Unity Theatre) documented by Andy Croft’s ‘The Communist Party in Literature’ via Dave Cope’s CPGB Bibliography (on-line).

As usual, ‘blurbs’ exaggerate. Upward is not THAT neglected. All major British newspapers obituarised him at length. Grandson David Allison maintains a website. Alan Walker produced (2000) a 113-page bibliography, with concomitant biographical pamphlet. Nicholas Wroe (*Guardian*, 23 August 2003) published a long centenary (Upward reached 105) interview. Likewise, Jonathan Heawood, *Observer* 30 March 2003. He was (2005) elected Fellow (plus Benson Medal) of The Royal Society of Literature. His own 1980s audio short story readings can be heard online.

All neglected by the present volume, NOT the first book-length Upward study. Mario Faraone’s mammoth (637 pages, 2012) *L’isola e il treno: L’opera di Edward Upward tra impegno politico e creatività artistica*, with long interview (in English – available online) and extensive bibliography, is ignored. Had they read it, some contributors here needn’t have wasted time on whether or not Upward embraced Stalinist Socialist Realism: he styles himself a Social Realist, emphasising the distinction.

Other major studies overlooked include Glyn Salton-Cox, ‘Edward Upward, Soviet Aesthetics, and Leftist Self-Fashioning,’ *Comparative Literature* 65 (2013), 408-428, and Ronald Paul, ‘Sartrean *Mauvaise foi* and Edward Upward’s novel *Journey to the Border*,’ *Sartre Studies International* 18 (2012), 66-85.

Apropos of this last, as Roger Bromley remarks (*The Spokesman* 124, p. 95, reviewing Raymond Williams, prominent in Kohlmann’s volume), ‘The idea of the intellectual as *engagé* is no longer fashionable in a culture of celebrity’. Older readers will remember that this was a hot potato in the 1950s, especially regarding the back pages of the *New Statesman*.

This eleven-person work suffers from a snag common to literary teamwork, especially when the editor's touch ranges from light to non-existent. We hear *ad nauseam* about Upward's relations with Auden, Isherwood, and Spender – to adapt Yogi Berra, *déjà lu* all over again. With no acknowledgement that this ground was already well tilled by (notably) David Garret Izzo's *Christopher Isherwood: His Era, His Gang and the Legacy of the Truly Strong Man* (2001), plus his fictionalised version *A Change of Heart* (2003), also Philip Bounds' *British Communism and the Politics of Literature 1928-1939* (2012; cf. my review-article in *Spokesman* 119, and Peter Firchow's *Strange Meetings: Anglo-German Literary Encounters 1910-1960* (2008).

Academic Newspeak abounds. Valentine Cunningham is especially egregious, with his 'awing wrestle', 'the moreness of a modalities-driven practice', and suchlike. Of course, palinodes are uncomfortable: having dismissed Upward as 'boring' and 'depending on clique puffery', Cunningham was forced to recant when confronted by Upward in person. As well this did not happen to Samuel Hynes: 'arid, unimaginative, unreadable', *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (1972).

Like Orwell, Upward was a self-made proletarian. Middle-class, he followed his doctor father to Repton where he and close friend Isherwood produced the acclaimed fantasy *Mortmere* short stories (a genre Upward continued to his death). After reading history and English at Cambridge, most of his teaching career (1932-1961) was at Alleyn's School, Dulwich, his first year coinciding with joining the CPGB. Simon Grimble (p. 81) makes the good point that in their conventions and discipline public schools and the CPGB mirrored each other.

Upward did not think much of Orwell's novels, especially *1984* – no surprise there. Nor of Graham Greene's, whose *It's a Battlefield* (1934) with its cynical treatment of the CPGB must have been anathema. Our authors mention Orwell's attack on Upward's insistence on Marxism as THE necessary literary criterion in *Inside The Whale*, but not the more temperate remarks in 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda'; cf. Paul Bond's discussion (30 March 2009) on the World Socialist Website. In fact, the target of attack, Upward's 'Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature', is actually not so rigidly dogmatic.

Abandoning poetry after Auden's withering criticism, Upward went on to produce his most famous and for *Spokesman* readers most relevant work, *The Spiral Ascent*, a heavily autobiographical trilogy about (with wife Hilda) life in the CPGB. Not great literature, but utterly absorbing; as

to its style, my own adjective would be ‘spare’, appropriate to its overall theme and growing despondency. Again, we need the wider context, provided by (e.g.) the unmentioned Brian McKenna’s ‘The British Communist Novel of the 1930s and 1940s. A Party of Equals? (And Does That Matter?),’ *Review of English Studies* 47 (1996), 369-385.

Under official suspicion (James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930-1960*, 2012), Upward and wife left the Party in 1948, denouncing Harry Pollitt’s more pragmatic line as anti-Leninist, albeit their discontent began in the late 1930s, hence credited as the impetus for Lawrence Parker’s *The Kick Inside – revolutionary opposition in the CPGB 1960-1971* (2007), also anticipating the 1951 furore over the Party’s ‘British Road to Socialism’ manifesto.

As late as 1970, the Upwards published an open letter (*The Marxist* 15, 1970, on-line) calling for fresh analyses of Stalinism and Revisionism. A little mystery here. Most accounts say Upward joined no other party, switching his energetic focus to CND – we know he disliked J. B. Priestley: what did he make of Bertrand Russell, Canon Collins, A. J. P. Taylor *et hoc genus omne*? However, one anonymous online necrology claims he joined another unspecified Socialist group. No sign that he gravitated to Trotskyism, the usual escape route. Did the ever-unchanging Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) tempt?

The final chapter (Joseph Rosenberg, ‘Edward Upward’s Remains’) has at its core Dominique LaPorte’s *History of Shit* (English tr. 2002) – not on my reading list, but a suitable excremental *envoi* for the jaw-breaking obscurantist jargon herein.

Still, despite this and the other imperfections, a welcome volume, comporting a deal of factual and literary interest. It helps clear the way for a straightforward English biography, preferably not by an academic. I shan’t be writing it, but have the obvious title – *Onward and Upward*.

*Barry Baldwin*

## Commitment

**Philip Bounds, *Notes from the End of History – A Memoir of the Left in Wales*, Merlin Press, 2014, 200 pages, paperback ISBN 9780850366112, £14.95**

This book is about Marxism and Communism. I enjoyed reading it for several reasons, not least of which is the similarity between the author’s

exposure to communism, described autobiographically, and my own with less immersion and no commitment. He is now a well established historian and author who records that he decided to become a communist at the age of 15. He remained one, with one or more defections and changes of party name, for the next 32 years. In an 'Afterword', taking account of events as recent as the banking crisis, the austerity programme, and the Middle East wars, he remains convinced that parliamentary democratic government leading to democratic socialism remains the way in which a capitalist world will be improved. Capitalism is now widely acknowledged to be dominant but defective, unstable, militant, and dangerous to the planet. Observing that as few as five members of his local branch of the Communist Party of Britain, all of them quite old, could be described as active, he finds no justification for optimism.

Democracy is a constant measure which the author insists must be applied to all political parties seeking revolutionary change, and he has no illusions about the extent to which they have failed. He was well aware of the murderous totalitarianism of the Stalin era, but was still dismayed when Gorbachev presided over the collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. In several chapters of this well researched and engagingly written book the author's optimism fails, until depression became a chronic illness unmanageable without medical treatment.

There are interesting personality portraits of party members and colleagues. He changes names but I suspect that they will remain identifiable to their colleagues. They are described with sympathy, bathos and humour. Robert's ministry to Emily at page 144 made me curl up with laughter. The author's account of Linda's midnight collection of discarded packaged fresh food near to its 'sell by' date from the rear of a city hotel and its distribution to undernourished families is poignant.

As a government inspector I inspected coal mines throughout the miners' strike and I can vouch for the accuracy of the author's account of the events of 1984-5. It was a partisan government attack on the trade union and labour movement in which even the destruction of the coal industry was no impediment.

The author's sensitivity and personal stress during these dramatic political events are apparent. He openly acknowledges his problems with god, for which I suspect he could have found easier solutions. I was reminded of the psychologist who opined elsewhere that to create the fear of god in a small child in primary education was just another form of child abuse.

*Christopher Gifford*

## Our Choice

**Sybil Oldfield, *'Thinking Against the Current': Literature and Political Resistance*, Sussex Academic Press, 2014, hardback ISBN 9781845195946, £50, paperback ISBN 9781845196899, £22.95**

Resistance is the theme for this collection of short papers – lectures, introductions, journal articles, chapters from books and from anthologies. The theme of resistance has jumped out at Sybil Oldfield, Reader Emerita in English literature at the University of Sussex, from the pages of diverse works, and over a wide range of time.

In the first section of *Thinking against the Current*, Oldfield reflects on the influence of the writings of Thomas Paine, author of the influential *Rights of Man*, and on William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley's denunciation of social injustice, on William Hazlitt's quick recognition of the implications of Malthus's social doctrine, and, in a fascinating analysis of *Great Expectations*, on Charles Dickens' uncomfortable writing about class.

This is not a book of literary criticism; Oldfield's focus is on action. Thomas Paine, for example, speaking out against economic and political oppression in America and in Britain, is the conduit for active resistance, inspired by the actions of Quakers (his forebears) in the face of persecution a century earlier. Most of the pieces focus on people who were directly embroiled in conflicts or developments of their time; although the written word was their instrument, it was just that, not thought of as literature but as a tool or weapon to promote change or to counter what they saw going on around them, often at great personal risk.

The context for the second part of the book is more familiar: nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain, and the mostly non-violent struggle of women to liberate themselves from centuries of role expectations and move towards equality. Oldfield draws attention to the abundance of biographical material, but finds that, as long as women's biographies were mostly written by men, many were pushed into an admonitory shape, where the approved qualities for women were depicted with the aim of having readers go and do likewise. Better this than no record – and indeed, Oldfield has identified 'a surprising number' of feminist male historians who did write with respect for women's aspirations, even before 1900. Through her work on such projects as the *Collective Biography of Women* (Continuum, 1999) and her research on the British women who supported the Hague International Congress of April 1915, Oldfield has done a great

deal to bring women into the light who would otherwise have remained unseen. She is also the author of studies of Mary Sheepshanks (*Spinsters of this Parish*, Virago, 1984) and of Mrs. Nassau Senior (*Jeanie, an Army of One, Sussex*, 2008). Short chapters increased my understanding of Virginia Woolf's agony; of the extent of Barbara Smith Bodichon's contribution; and of Eleanor Rathbone's relationship with Indian women.

Oldfield deplors the extreme to which the current trend has been to belittle biography in general as well as hagiography; we need to know of the lives of our forebears. Throughout *Thinking against the Current*, we are periodically subjected to long lists of women's names, or occasionally, of women's works. This can be tedious, but it is clearly purposeful; these are names that should be familiar to us, and it will not be Oldfield's fault if they are forgotten.

The final and longest section brings us to the twentieth century and focuses on women and the problem of war. I was deeply engaged by the chapter on Simone Weil's struggle, in body as well as in spirit, to understand and counter the brutality and militarism she saw in war, and at the same time deal with the oppression of spreading fascism. Less new to me is a chapter on Jane Addams and the efforts of feminist pacifists to bring forward rational solutions to the First World War, to the Treaty of Versailles, and to the arms race, at a time when a solution was still within reach. Indeed, as Oldfield says, this was '[t]he chance the world missed'.

As in earlier periods, what men have written has not always included the lives of the most exciting and innovative women, which have had to wait for the research of active feminist women. Oldfield draws attention to the emphasis placed on men in the work done to uncover the history of the limited resistance to the Nazi regime in Germany; the story that has emerged is largely that of attempts at institutional resistance – in the East, through the Communist Party, in the west through trade unions and some churches, all with almost exclusively male leadership. Oldfield helps fill in the other side of the story; her research brings to life vividly the efforts of many German women, working in tiny groups of individuals to defy the regime, to help the persecuted, to put out pamphlets begging others to refuse to be co-opted into complicity. I found these chapters the most important in an important book, and painful to read. I have a friend who survived that era in Germany, who says that at age seventeen she looked around and there was no one she could trust. I was drawn by Oldfield's account into the lives of women who felt compelled to challenge the overpowering force of the regime; and I found myself dreading the moment when their resistance would be discovered, as I knew it would be,

for most of them. Life after life ended in a concentration camp or in death by torture, or, for Sophie Scholl, by beheading. We have known so little of them, and they did not overthrow the regime. Did they fail? Somehow it comes through that their lives should be celebrated as a triumph.

I could wish that Oldfield had written a concluding piece to pull together her thinking on the difficult issues and events she has dealt with. The book instead concludes with a previously unpublished conference paper on 'Righteous Violence', which in part explores the relation between violence in the home and out of it. In this last paper, Oldfield comes nearer to despair than throughout the rest of the book, at one stage stopping with a jolt to question herself: 'How nihilistic can you get, Sybil?' (p.260). I have to turn back to the penultimate chapter, which contains her reflections on some American Visionaries (reprinted from *Women Against the Iron Fist*), from Helen Keller to the poet, Sharon Olds. Although Oldfield reflects that the 'unquenchable optimism' of Helen Keller, born in 1880, 'may be unattainable to someone born in 1942', she acknowledges that Olds, in spite of her sense of endless violence passed down from one generation to the next, ultimately believes that which path we take is still our choice. This is surely the message of this thought-provoking book.

Jo Vellacott

*Conscientious Objection*, the new edition of Jo Vellacott's acclaimed book about Bertrand Russell and the pacifists in the First World War, will feature in *Spokesman 128*.

## New Hope Down Under

**Marcia Langton, *The Quiet Revolution; Indigenous People and the Resources Boom (Boyer Lectures 2012)*, ABC Books/Harper Collins, 2013, 176 pages, Kindle edition, ASIN B0098BW3X4, £4.99**

**Bob Brown, *Optimism: Reflections on a Life of Action*, Hardie Grant, 2014, 288 pages, Kindle edition, ASIN B00LZW6TLQ, £6.71**

David Browning has just brought back for me from a visit to Australia two new books which describe new hopes in Australia, one among the aboriginal people and the other among the Greens. In 2012, Marcia Langton, herself one of the Australian aboriginal people and Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, gave five lectures for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and these were then published by Harper Collins. The lectures trace the progress of aboriginal

thinking and the thinking about the Australian aboriginal people over the last fifty years or so.

When I first went to visit my wife's family in Australia fifty years ago, the aboriginal people were seen either as 'noble savages' in their pastoral lands or as pathetic, drunken, drug-taking outcasts in the towns. Their elders asked us tourists not to stray over their sacred places, such as ULURU. We obeyed, but most did not. The changes in fifty years traced by Marcia Langton have been remarkable. They amount to what she calls 'A Quiet Revolution'.

There are two major reasons for the change: the first is the 'resources boom'. Several parts of Australia, which the aboriginal people occupied, were found to contain large reserves of valuable minerals – gold, bauxite, iron, copper, and others. Mining them required labour, and increasingly educated and disciplined labour. The mine owners had to turn to the indigenous people. At the same time, governments became concerned to recognise the ownership rights of indigenous peoples in mineral-bearing lands. Marcia Langton's lectures analyse the several conflicting forces at work. Even among whites, ie those of European descent, and especially among the Greens, there were dreams of 'noble savages' and preserving pastoral lands, and among the aboriginal people a reluctance to abandon historic cultures. In fact, Marcia Langton can show that the new aboriginal middle class of businessmen, lawyers, teachers, and engineers has not abandoned their historic cultures and ceremonies, to which they still devote time and attention. Perhaps the most astonishing fact in Marcia Langton's book is the statistical record that as many young people in Australia from indigenous origins now apply for medical studies as non-indigenous. Marcia Langton's lectures end with the following words:

'A new generation of aboriginal people is turning dreams into reality; education, economic participation, self-esteem and success are part of the new aboriginal world, and there is no going back.'

My second Australian book of hope is even called *Optimism*. Bob Brown, its author and founding member of the Australian Greens, introduces the book's 'Reflections on a Life of Action' with the following words:

'Optimism is the key ingredient for any successful human endeavour - and isn't keeping Earth viable the greatest endeavour we can ever undertake? It is a fortunate life if a person feels more optimistic than ever before. That's me.'

For someone who is openly gay, and has a long political history – in the Tasmanian Parliament and the Australian Senate – and has Murdoch

against him, that is really something. Bob Brown quotes Bertrand Russell, ‘The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt’. And Brown goes on to put Russell’s dictum another way, ‘The trouble with the global political arrangement is that the power falls more readily into the hands of the selfish, cruel and cocksure’. ‘But it is no good feeling helpless,’ Brown goes on. ‘The challenge to intelligent folk is to take over – if we get it right, [it] will host our kind into a magnificent future.’

The story that Bob Brown tells of his life certainly suggests what can be done if we get it right. It is not easy to read; 53 short chapters, which jump about in the years and issues they range over. There is much about his coming out openly as a homosexual, to live with his partner, Paul Thomas; about his time as a doctor – in Britain, Tasmania and Australia over many years; his hundreds of flights between the Parliaments in Hobart and Canberra and work with Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

His great love is of the wilderness in which he lives, at the foot of the mountains in Tasmania. This leads him to devote his life to fighting to protect the valleys threatened by dam builders and the forests under attack from the loggers. He has wonderful stories of those men and women who risked their lives, including one woman who made a nest for herself at the top of a tall tree, to live on, to keep off the loggers until they set fire to the bush and drove her out. Bob Brown became the founder of the Australian Greens, and as their representative visited Europe, Africa and Latin America, and there are chapters on the people he met in all these lands. It becomes clear, as you read, that Marcia Langton is right in criticising the Greens for their lack of support for the participation of the aboriginal people in the Australian middle class. Bob Brown sees them only as fellow defenders of the wilderness.

There is a jewel in the crown of *Optimist* in chapters 40 to 43, all carrying the title of ‘Third Green Oration’ with sub-titles, ‘We People of the Earth’, ‘Plutocracy or Democracy?’, ‘A Global Parliament’, and ‘One Person, One Vote, One Value, One Planet’. This sums up Bob Brown’s philosophy and, however you react to the rest of the book, these chapters should be read, studied and publicised. Bob Brown takes seriously the dangers of increasing inequality among the earth’s peoples, as well as the excessive use of fossil energy, the subsequent threat of carbon deposits in the atmosphere, and global warming leading to climate change. He insists that only a global democratic response can save the one planet that we know has evolved human intelligence and begun to explore the universe. The chapters that follow no.43 offer small beer to assuage our thirst after

that; but the care of lambs, rescuing whales, preserving goshawks in a countryman's life all leave Bob Brown wondering if there is a God, but certain that human intelligence will find a way to survive. Hence the title of the book, *Optimism*.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Circumnavigating Byzantium

**Henry A. Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, Allen Lane, 2014, 432 pages, ISBN 9780241004265, £25**

Dr. Kissinger's latest book is an impressive piece of work divided into nine main chapters (350 pages) plus a short introduction and conclusion, tellingly entitled 'World Order in our Time?' Acknowledgements, notes and index make up the remainder.

The first two chapters, dedicated to the rise and fall of the Western European world order and its penultimate contribution to modern international relations, the Westphalian system of states, cover 85 pages. Chapters 7 and 8, which deal with the role of the United States, take another 98. Thus, about 60 per cent of the book is devoted to 'the West' and its contribution to developing world order models. Such an observation is preempted by Dr. Kissinger pointing out that, separately, he devoted an entire book to China<sup>1</sup>. Chapter 9, which is concerned with technological developments, could be considered geopolitically 'non-aligned'.

Dr. Kissinger's motives in writing this book might be unveiled to a great extent by the following excerpt from a recent (November 2014) interview with *Der Spiegel*<sup>2</sup>:

**INTRODUCTION:** *'Kissinger recently published his 17<sup>th</sup> book, a work with the not exactly modest title "World Order". When preparing to sit down with us for an interview, he asked that "world order" be the topic ...*

**SPIEGEL:** In your new book, you frequently point to the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648 as a reference system for world order, as a result of the Thirty Years' War. Why should a treaty dating back more than 350 years still be relevant today?

**KISSINGER:** The Westphalian Peace was made after almost a quarter of the

Central European population perished because of wars, disease and hunger. The treaty was based on the necessity to come to an arrangement with each other, not on some sort of superior morality. Independent nations decided not to interfere in the affairs of other states. They created a balance of power which we are missing today.

**SPIEGEL:** Do we need another Thirty Years' War to create a new world order?

**KISSINGER:** Well, that's a very good question. Do we achieve a world order through chaos or through insight? One would think that the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the dangers of climate change and terrorism should create enough of a common agenda. So I would hope that we can be wise enough not to have a Thirty Years' War.'

Given the desire of the author to contribute to the achievement of 'a world order through insight' rather than 'through chaos', one has to cite the limitations the author himself accepts. They are clearly stated in an excerpt from the Conclusion, which is also printed on the back-cover of the book:

'Long ago, in youth, I was brash enough to think myself able to pronounce on "The Meaning of History". I now know that history's meaning is a matter to be discovered, not declared. It is a question we must attempt to answer as best we can in recognition that it will remain open to debate; that each generation will be judged by whether the greatest, most consequential issues of the human condition have been faced, and that decisions to meet these challenges must be taken by statesmen before it is possible to know what the outcome may be.'

Rather than criticizing parts of *World Order*, I focus on what is completely missing; there are some incomprehensible omissions from such a serious work.

Firstly, there is complete omission – let alone analysis of – the Wars of Yugoslavia, although their occurrence, initially with NATO connivance and, later, with NATO's illegal military bombardment, played a major role in unravelling the Westphalian order in the Old Continent immediately after the end of the Cold War. Other post-Cold War American military adventures are not shunned. Since the diplomatic 'collateral damage' inflicted on the body of European collective security is by now apparent, and since the author appears to be a supporter of the Westphalian system for Europe and for the entire world, this is a glaring omission indeed.

Secondly, there is no reference to the Boshin Wars and Satsuma Rebellion marking the resistance of Japanese society to the imperial Meiji

Restoration. Regarding this period (1868-1912) and the intervention of US Navy under Commander Perry, Dr. Kissinger writes:

‘Surveying Perry’s far superior firepower, Japan’s leaders concluded that direct resistance to “the black ships” would be futile. They relied on the cohesion of their society to absorb the shock and maintain their independence by that cohesion ... Japan set out, with studious attention to detail and subtle analysis of the balance of material and psychological forces, to enter the international order based on Western concepts of sovereignty, free trade, international law, technology, and military power – albeit for the purpose of expelling the foreign domination ...’

The author praises the Japanese authorities of the time for their crafty attitude in lieu of western material superiority, but makes no reference whatsoever to the civil wars and the simmering unrest that plagued Japan for a decade until the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877. (Hollywood has done better with its film *The Last Samurai*.) Those civil wars were an expression of spontaneous resistance, even of a highly disciplined society such as Japan, to imposed ‘modernization’; they merit proper attention by any thinker who aspires to assist in achieving world order ‘through insight’.

Thirdly, although the author (correctly) pays attention to the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 (it was the first modern war in which a major European power was defeated by an Asian one), he does not mention at all the Soviet-Japanese conflicts of 1938–39 (the Khalkhin Gol battles, and so on), which resulted in the decisive defeat of the Japanese Imperial Army at the hands of the Red Army and its Mongolian allies. This was the first instance when Japanese power and advance in mainland Asia was checked; the impact of those defeats was such that Japan refrained from attacking the unguarded eastern Soviet Union, even when Moscow’s hands were full repulsing Hitler in the European lands of the USSR.

The fourth and most glaring omission, in my opinion, gives rise to the superscript: ‘Circumnavigating Byzantium’. This was the first inexplicable omission, noted in chapter one, dealing with the gradual development of European concept(s) of world order. After a passing reference to Rome, Dr. Kissinger spends ample time analyzing the Western European medieval order, Charlemagne, Holy Roman Empire, and so on. Yet, there is no reference whatsoever to the existence of a parallel European (and Christian) system. This lack of analysis of the Byzantine legacy is inexplicable; all the more so since, as Zbigniew Brzezinski points out in his book *Strategic Vision* (see *Spokesman 117*), the Eastern Roman Empire is the most long-lasting in human history<sup>3</sup>, asserting that

‘... the Byzantine defense of Asia Minor and Eastern Europe maintained, for four centuries, a line behind which the West began developing its own post-Roman ideas of world order’.

Upon finishing chapter one, and verifying that there is no Byzantium whatsoever in Dr. Kissinger’s analysis of the European contribution to ideas of world order, this reviewer earnestly wondered ‘*how on earth will he analyse Russia now?*’ The answer came soon enough: chapter two begins with the cliché ‘The Russian Enigma’. It is sad that Dr. Kissinger, who could not be accused of ‘anti-Russian bias’ nowadays, still fails to trace properly the background of Russian thinking regarding world order. Regarding China, he writes (Introduction, p. 10):

‘During my first visit to Beijing, ... in 1971 ... I mentioned that to the American delegation, China was a “land of mystery”. Premier Zhou Enlai responded “You will find it not mysterious. When you have become familiar with it, it will not seem as mysterious as before.” There were 900 million Chinese, he observed, and it seemed perfectly normal to them.’

No mysteries, nor enigmas.

Unfortunately, due to the circumnavigation around the Byzantine heritage of Russia, we still read clichés such as:

‘Russia sought its resurgence in its undiluted faith and in the coherence of a single, divinely sanctioned authority overpowering all divisions – the Czar as “the living icon of God”... A common Christian faith and a shared elite language (French) underscored the commonality of perspective with the West. Yet early European visitors to czarist Russia found themselves in a land of almost surreal extremes and thought they saw, beneath the veneer of a modern Western monarchy, a despotism modelled on *Mongol and Tartar* practices – “European discipline supporting the tyranny of Asia” in the uncharitable phrase of the Marquis de Custine.’<sup>4</sup> (*World Order*, p. 54, our Italics)

What passes here, albeit labelled ‘uncharitable’, as ‘despotism modeled on Mongol and Tartar practices’ and ‘European discipline supporting the tyranny of Asia’ could be understood for what it is – Eastern Roman heritage. What early Western European visitors saw in Czarist Russia but did not recognize (the original had fallen two-and-a-half centuries earlier) was a replica of Romano-Byzantine despotism. In the words of Robert Byron, the essence of Byzantium lay in the ‘Triple Fusion’: a Roman body (hence the ‘European discipline’), a Greek mind, and a mystical oriental soul. Russia was indeed despotic, but there was nothing Mongol or Tartar in her despotism. (Mongols were superstitiously impartial regarding

religions; nothing Mongol in Russian deep faith.)

Taking into account Dr. Kissinger's stated rejection of anti-Russian oversimplifications, and observing his difficulties in 'understanding Russia', one cannot but recall a prescient excerpt from Jan Oberg's 1990 article:<sup>5</sup>

'Czech playwright and president, Václav Havel, when in January 1990 addressing the Polish Sejm, argued that Eastern Europe should not be seen as a poor dissident or a bewildered prisoner set free but "as someone who has something to offer, namely spiritual and moral inspiration, daring peace initiatives, an unexploited creative potential, an ethos of new freedom and impulses toward bold and quick-moving solutions". And he rounded off this speech with the following words: "The most dangerous enemy today is not the dark forces of totalitarianism, intriguers or leagues of gangsters – it is our own dark sides. My programme as president is therefore based on the principle of infusing spirituality, moral responsibility, humanity and humility into politics and, thus, insist on there being something higher than we humans, that our deeds shall not disappear into the dark holes of our time but be preserved, somewhere, investigated, evaluated – that we have neither a right nor a reason to maintain that we understand everything or can do everything."'

One may wonder with whom in the West Havel can have a dialogue at this level? Who in the West would respond in these existential and visionary terms? Why is the response of the West first of all economic, secondly cautiously political, showing almost no military response and, finally, not at all existential? And why is it so easy to discern a sentiment of reconciliation in the East but not in the West?

Notwithstanding the aforementioned omissions, *World Order* is certainly worth reading as a rich source of analysis and information; if read in tandem with Brzezinski's Strategic Vision, it affords some insight into the two mainstream American schools of thought on international relations. Thanks to the *Der Spiegel* interview, *World Order* gave its author the chance to make an unequivocal statement regarding the responsibilities of the West for the creation and callous escalation of the Ukraine crisis. When the interviewer suggested that what Dr. Kissinger was saying was that 'the West has at least a kind of responsibility for the escalation [in Ukraine],' Kissinger replied, 'Yes, I am saying that.'

*Theodore N. Iliadis*

## Notes

1. *On China*, 2011, Penguin Press
2. *Der Spiegel* 13/11/2014, Interview with Henry Kissinger: 'Do We Achieve World Order Through Chaos or Insight?', available online, which includes this

exchange: **'SPIEGEL:** So let's talk about a concrete example: How should the West react to the Russian annexation of Crimea? ... **Kissinger:** Crimea is a symptom, not a cause. Furthermore, Crimea is a special case... But if the West is honest with itself, it has to admit that there were mistakes on its side. The annexation of Crimea was not a move toward global conquest. It was not Hitler moving into Czechoslovakia. ... **SPIEGEL:** What you're saying is that the West has at least a kind of responsibility for the escalation? **Kissinger:** Yes, I am saying that.'

3. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision* (Basic Books, NY, 2012), page 25, Figure I.I, Imperial Longevity
4. Robert Byron, *The Byzantine Achievement: An Historical Perspective, C.E. 330-1453* Routledge, 1929. Reprint Routledge, 2013, London
5. TFF PressInfo, Jan Oberg, *Coping With the Loss of a Close Enemy* 10-11-14. Reprint of a 1990 article: *Perestroika as a Challenge to the West*

## Red Decade

**Ernest Tate, *Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s & 60s, Volume 1, Canada 1955-1965, Volume 2, Britain 1965-1970*, Resistance Books, 2014, Volume 1 ISBN 9780902869691, £9, Volume 2 paperback ISBN 9780902869608, £13**

Ernie Tate's readable memoir came as something of a revelation, after 30 plus years working at the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. For example, there's a photograph of Stephen Hawking, camera hung round neck and walking with sticks, alongside Tariq Ali and Vanessa Redgrave at the head of the Vietnam demonstration in London *en route* for the US Embassy at Grosvenor Square, on 17 March 1968 (see below). Hawking was, and perhaps still is, a great fan of Bertrand Russell. But Tate also has much to tell us about Nottingham's 'International Group' and the considerable contribution made by people from this small city in the English Midlands, particularly Ken Coates and Pat Jordan, and how Ken came to work with Bertrand Russell and the Peace Foundation.

'I arrived in London on my new assignment to help the Fourth International in the autumn of 1965,' writes Tate, who had travelled from Canada. He soon journeyed north to meet the Nottingham group, publishers of *The Week*, 'a mimeographed socialist weekly co-edited by Robin Blackburn and Ken Coates that took its name from a radical weekly founded during the Spanish Civil War by the *Daily Worker* correspondent in Spain, Claude Cockburn'. Pat Jordan is acknowledged as a 'modest, soft

spoken man who was mainly responsible for the production of *The Week*, launched in 1963, which circulated in left trade union and left Labour Party circles, 'with a coverage of Third World struggles greater than any other British left journal'.

Tate traces the development of the Nottingham group in some detail from 1965. His arrival coincided with Ken Coates' first expulsion from the Labour Party in November that year under 'the pretext of his writings in *Briefing* at the Labour Party's Annual Conferences, where he had sharply criticised the [Wilson] Labour government's failures on the economy and immigration and Vietnam ...' (Ken was summarily expelled a second time, in early 1999, whilst he was an elected Member of the European Parliament, for opposing Tony Blair's imposition of 'closed lists' of candidates for that year's European elections.) Back in the '60s, Ken campaigned for his readmission to the Labour Party throughout the five-year duration of Tate's stay in Britain: meanwhile, Ken '... concentrated his efforts on developing a "workers control campaign" and working with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation'.

In September 1965, Bertrand Russell had publicly announced his support for *The Week*; on the front cover of the issue dated 23 September 1965, his name appears near the end of the list of sponsors, after Eric Varley MP and before the activist and writer, Malcolm Caldwell. Around this time, a delegation from the Russell Foundation, 'led by Russell's secretary, Ralph Schoenman, headed up to Nottingham to discuss co-operation in opposing the [Vietnam] war. Schoenman invited Ken to take a full-time position with the Foundation but Ken initially declined, on the advice of Ernest Mandel'. (Characteristically, this account is carefully referenced to letters in Mandel's archive at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.) Not long after, Ken accepted the invitation to join the Foundation, which ultimately led to the location of its offices in Nottingham.

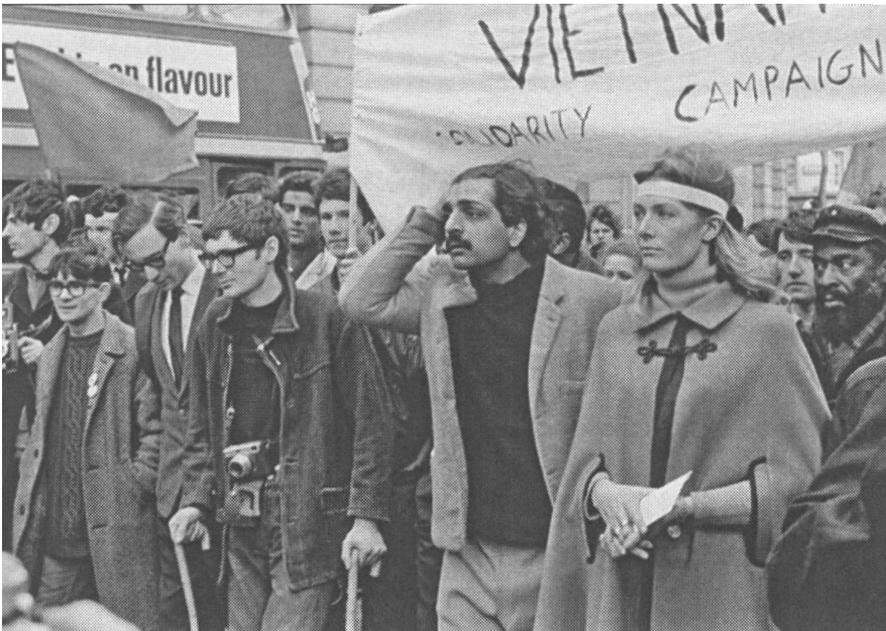
Tate recounts in absorbing detail the history of the early years of the Foundation. He traces the influence of developments in North America on the gathering protests against the Vietnam war in Britain, on which he, Schoenman, Ken and others worked closely. He records the break between Russell and Schoenman, which came to a head in 1969. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and the International Marxist Group, which expelled Ken Coates in 1967, figure centrally. As an appendix, Tate reprints the Metropolitan Police Special Branch redacted report on the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign 'Autumn Offensive' of 1968; part of a 'three inch thick file' obtained by journalists Solomon Hughes and Paul Mason.

Dated September 1968, the Special Branch report post-dates the sessions of the International War Crimes Tribunal founded by Bertrand Russell to ‘prevent the crime of silence’ over US criminal conduct in Vietnam. Tate shines a revealing light on the difficult and disputatious history of the Tribunal; in the circumstances, it is striking that the Tribunal accomplished so much and established a useful precedent of civil initiative, which continues to be invoked.

In volume 2, Tate goes on to chronicle his experiences in the International Marxist Group in Britain, and engagement with struggles in South America, particularly in Argentina. Volume 1 of *Revolutionary Activism* covers the years 1955 to 1965 which the author spent in Canada, where he went ‘as a working-class immigrant from Northern Ireland,’ according to the Publisher’s Foreword.

*Revolutionary Activism Volume 2* is, as the publishers claim, an important contribution to the history of the Left in Britain, and indeed more widely. It strikes many chords with those of us who have spent decades working at the Russell Foundation in Nottingham as we uncover our own history.

*Tony Simpson*



Lewis Morley Archives

*Stephen Hawking, Tariq Ali and Vanessa Redgrave, 1968*

## Transport and General Workers

**Sheila Cohen, *Notoriously Militant: The Story of a Union Branch*, Merlin Press, 2013, paperback ISBN 9780850366457, £15.95**

During the 1988 strike of Ford's Dagenham workers, a *Daily Mail* reporter gatecrashed a meeting of their union branch. In his subsequent report he describes the TGWU 1107 branch as 'notoriously militant', a nickname they readily adopted with characteristic humour. Sheila Cohen has also adopted the nickname for the title of the book in which she chronicles the history of the branch from its founding, in the 1940s, to its final demise in the merger of Dagenham's Unite branches in 2012. In mapping this history of a trade union branch, Cohen cuts a path through many of the defining events of post-war British industrial relations. Importantly, these sometimes relatively small events were also the making and shaping of the mythology of industrial relations by the mass media of the 1960s and 1970s and, reworked, have become the musical theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Car plants were the mythmakers of industrial relations of the 1960s and 1970s: British Leyland at Longbridge in Birmingham and at Cowley in Oxford, and Ford in Halewood, Liverpool, as well as in the East London Borough of Dagenham, give rise to 'moral panics'. With stories of car plant 'mindless militancy', shop stewards – Derek Robinson at Longbridge and Alan Thornett at Cowley amongst them – were made 'folk devils' by the media. There was always more behind the militancy myths. The popular press could sensationalise each walkout without any consideration of the deep roots that acted as the spark to events. Tracing the development of the Dagenham plant and its industrial relations through slightly more than a century, and particularly in its heyday of production and reputation in the 1950s through to the 1980s, Cohen gives a much more rounded view of the underlying tensions and conflicts which underpin the myth.

Almost imperceptibly, battles of the class war, now 30 or more years in the past, have been transmogrified into the romantic legends of contemporary mass media, first in cinema then in musical theatre. While there are several recent examples, the primary one is *Made in Dagenham*, based on the sewing machinists' dispute of 1968 and their role in legislation for equal pay for women against the trade union and political establishment.

Maybe we should not expect historical accuracy in the contemporary media, no more than we found it in the reporting at the time. Fortunately,

the story and atmosphere are recounted more accurately in this study of the 1107 branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union. On the Dagenham machinist dispute, and the very atmosphere of workplace industrial relations through its rise and fall in post-war Britain, Sheila Cohen has presented a readable and sympathetic account rooted in systematic research and drawing heavily on the accounts of key participants. Cohen makes clear that the machinist's dispute was initially and 'categorically about grading' (p. 87) and not about equal pay. Ford had instituted a new grading system over which there were numerous disputes, 'men ... hailed the women's all-out action as signalling some hope that the hated structure could be defeated'. The dispute was reworked, without the strikers, by senior shop stewards and union officials at Ford into one of 'equal pay for women'. The possibility of using the dispute to further her political agenda was seen by Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Employment.

The story of the machinists takes up a few quite central pages of this account of trade unionism at Dagenham. *Notoriously Militant* begins with the establishment of Ford, the prime mover of mass production, and comes into its stride with the militant campaign by Dagenham workers for the recognition of shop floor representation at the plant. This was in an industry that many had previously argued was not ripe for organising. The campaign for shop steward representation, Cohen indicates, was challenged by the TUC establishment – through Vic Feather, later to become General Secretary – as well as Ford management. By 1946, the campaign resembled the sit-down campaigns in the US motor industry – but not Ford – of a decade before. 'Every morning ... the 12,000 employees have "clocked in" but have just stood around their machines and attended meetings in the departments' (p. 42). Winning the right to a relatively precarious recognition began to build the reputation, if not the mythological stereotype, for industrial militancy, not just of Dagenham or even motor industry shop stewards. In 1957, after the suspension of two shop stewards, another walkout was triggered as a third steward was suspended after summoning a shop meeting through the usual means, ringing a bell. This incident clearly had more to do with the antagonism of a plant foreman, initiating the suspensions, and management dismissing the bell ringer, than the power of the stewards. However, this seemed the template for the image of shop stewards of the 1950s and 1960s. 'Fred Kite', the shop steward played by Peter Sellers in the 1959 UK film, *I'm Alright Jack*, could call out the whole factory in a walk-out, or 'Paddy', the steward played by Miriam Karlin in *The Rag Trade* TV series of the early

1960s, could blow a whistle – perhaps more suitable for television sound quality than a bell – to call a meeting of all female staff in the toilets.

Other disputes are examined, and Cohen does not avoid the sometimes trivial which may buttress the stereotype militancy. The walk-out almost sparked by ‘not enough cheese in the cheese rolls,’ the ‘everyday militancy’ was, like many similar outbursts from shop floor workers, averted by stewards. Some of the humour of shop floor politics permeates the study. Interviewees recall the time when, after dismissals for drinking during their break on the line, stewards had scoured local shops for non-alcoholic lager in black cans to use in their successful defence during disciplinary proceedings. However, *Notoriously Militant* is far more than a catalogue of strikes and disputes. Cohen traces the changes that occurred in the very relations at Ford in Dagenham, the motor industry, and post-war trade unionism and employment relations more generally. Contestation is focused not just on the speed of the line, but also its opposite, the problem of lay-offs, as the capacity of mass production was confronted with the stresses of a vacillating market with the often seasonal demand for cars.

By the 1980s, management were addressing the emergent threat posed by Japanese car manufacturers, considering their success due to new organisational and management techniques as well as a more acquiescent workforce, rather than because of under-investment. Ford initiated its ‘after Japan’ campaign of changes which sparked the 1988 dispute. Unions came to challenge the assumptions of just-in-time and lean production as well as team working, which were being used to undermine the established traditions of workplace representation.

While the portrayal of the 1107-Branch of the TGWU at Dagenham tends towards the heroic, Cohen does not ignore the problems and tensions inherent in trade unionism. An interesting part of *Notoriously Militant*, discussing the end of the century, considers the racism within management and unions. Trying to counter a longstanding reputation for racism, Ford had presented a multiracial picture of their workforce in an advertising campaign. However, when this campaign was transported to Poland the image was ‘whited out,’ much to the anger of black and Asian members of the workforce.

The tensions between plants and within the union seem to overshadow the slow death of the ‘notorious militants’. Investment in mass production remained highly political; in truth, these were the remnants of the ‘Fordist state’, well into the twenty first century. In the background were the threats around declining conditions and staffing, with Ford streamlining and

shifting production of models to find the optimum environment for their own advantage, whatever the workers' concessions. Moving Sierra assembly to the Genk plant in Belgium, the future location of Fiesta production, the closure of Southampton, which produced the Transit, and playing off Halewood and Dagenham proved ominous. In February 2002, the closure of the assembly plant in Dagenham with the last Fiesta, almost the 11 millionth vehicle to come off the line in 71 years, symbolised a number of changes identified by Cohen. While the engine plant remained in production, this employed a fraction of the workforce compared to the site in its prime, with a fundamental impact on this poor London Borough. It also symbolised a victory for a very different approach to trade unionism. Rather than 'union-as-movement' there remained the 'union-as-institution', 'the crucial surge of the late 1960s to 1980s undermined by the reformist "common sense" of union-management collaboration' (p. 194). The union remains but is now distanced from the shop floor, with shop stewards be-suited and distanced from the membership.

While mapping the end of 'notorious militants', this is not a pessimistic story. Despite a somewhat romantic view of the shop stewards and their union branch, Cohen does not sound the death knell. A glimmer of hope is seen in recent events such as the protest of Visteon workers at supplier plants to Ford, challenging closure to get what they were entitled by occupation. Is this some resurgence? If trade unionism's comeback unlikely amongst the workers of mass production – unless we look far east – or call centre and zero hours workers? What about unionised public sector workers, teachers, civil servants, or fire and rescue workers? Thirty years on, will audiences watch musicals based on the heroic exploits of contract cleaners at John Lewis or the University of London?

*Alan Tuckman*