

Reviews

America's Dissident

Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, Atlantic Books, 721 pages, hardback ISBN 9781843547044, £25

The publishers tell us that this, the first full-scale life of J. Robert Oppenheimer, has 'been twenty-five years in the making'. That is understandable, because it has made a ponderous volume, and embodies prodigious research. But some of those years have been eaten up by the publishers themselves. The original publication in the United States was dated 2005: but the British edition has been waiting until the beginning of 2008 before seeing the light of day. It must be said that the book was worth waiting for.

Like another famous dissident, Andrei Sakharov, Oppenheimer became celebrated as 'the father of the atomic bomb'. He was not, however, a proud father and his biographers liken him to Prometheus who stole fire from the heavens and gave it to men. Zeus did not approve of this, and directed that he be nailed to a rock on Mount Caucasus and perpetually devoured by eagles. Oppenheimer was devoured all right, but not by eagles. His numerous detractors have not grown in stature as the story of their criticisms has evolved.

Of course, Oppenheimer was vulnerable to criticism. Before he became the Director of the Manhattan Project which steamed away at the elaboration of the atomic bomb, he had not only been a most distinguished nuclear physicist, but also a figure of fun. The family was very wealthy, having made it big in the garment industry. They lived in a splendid apartment which was also home to an art collection which was the very byword for opulence: a clutch of Van Goghs, the odd Renoir, and a small peppering of other post-impressionist masters.

But the great wealth which surrounded the young Oppenheimer did not contribute to his popularity. Neither did his precocious cleverness. His peers often found him distinctly unpleasant, vain and distant. The unpleasantness is copiously documented by his biographers. But they have a great deal more to tell us about his scientific work, which developed very early, and took him into the company of Max Born at Göttingen and Niels Bohr. His genius was completely evident, but it did not stop the lesser mortals among whom he moved, from perceiving it as arrogance. He corrected his distinguished tutors without any consideration for their own sensitivities. Was his abrasive treatment of student colleagues partly explicable by a growing culture of anti-Semitism?

What is clear is that, after a committed disinterest in politics, the rise of Hitler began to transform his outlook. 'Beginning in late 1936', he told the inquisition which confronted him in 1954,

'I had a continuing smouldering fury about the treatment of Jews in Germany ... I began to understand how deeply political and economic events could affect men's lives. I began to feel the need to participate more fully in the life of the community.'

But it must have been difficult for an intellectual, however brilliant, separated from his fellows by the accident of considerable wealth, to relate to other American students. It was easier to relate to the American Communists, naïve, simplistic and at times generous. In the mid-thirties, his father passed him a copy of the Webbs' book on Soviet Communism, about which they first appended a subtitle which asked the question, was it 'a new civilisation?' Soon after, they removed the question mark. Oppenheimer was by no means the only victim of this ponderous scholarship, which, in Tom Paine's immortal words, pitied the plumage, but forgot the dying bird. He had previously read *Capital*, or so he claimed. He would have been better served with that as his guiding text.

Bird and Sherwin present us with a fascinating view of Oppenheimer's voyage through the American left. He gave money to the Communist Party, and helped raise \$1,500 to send an ambulance to the Republican forces in Spain. All these good deeds were later to become the subject of ferocious enquiries by his tormentors, when it was realised that the genius who had given them the atomic bomb was also guilty of supporting so wide a variety of humane causes.

By the time of the 1940s, Oppenheimer's preoccupation with the evil deeds of Hitler had come to be shared by General Leslie Groves, and Secretary for War, Henry Stimson, who chose Oppenheimer to direct the pursuit of nuclear weapons at the Los Alamos laboratories. To his genius as a theoretical physicist he was very quickly to add a remarkable capacity as an organiser, and inspirer of collective effort. Much later, the McCarthyite pack at his heels, he was judged to be unfit to share nuclear secrets. But when the bomb was being developed, his were the secrets that everybody else was sharing.

Be that as it may, Oppenheimer seems to have shared in the ethos of the Los Alamos project, and been borne along by its commitment. He even advised the military on how to use the new bomb once it had been perfected, at which point it could be optimally detonated. By this time, many of his colleagues, less brilliant, no doubt, had decided that they did not approve of the use of the bomb against defenceless civilians, and that the most that they could accept would be the dropping of an exemplary demonstration bomb where all the lessons could be drawn without killing anyone.

That was not the American way. By the time Oppenheimer's dalliance with the left had come to the attention of Senator McCarthy, he was already tormenting himself with the moral responsibility for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The FBI soon characterised him as a nervous wreck, and President Truman saw him as a cry-baby. There were many others who were to weep, but the tears of this brilliant man would perhaps weigh heavier in Heaven than those of all the rest of us.

Global Turmoil

Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (editors), *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints*, Merlin Press, paperback ISBN9780850365870, £14.95

The *Socialist Register*, which has appeared annually since 1964, is devoted this year to a global survey of movements and ideas since the inauguration of the neoliberal counter-revolution – marked, at its high point, by the advent to power of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA – some thirty years ago. The survey is comprised of some twenty-two contributions by experts, with a preface by the editors, Leo Panitch and Colin Leys.

One of these, by Elmar Altvater of the Free University, Berlin, traces the roots of twentieth century neoliberal theory back to two right-wing economists, Friedrich von Hayek and Walter Eucken. They argued in the pre and post-Second World War periods that free market economics were the only possible basis for a free and democratic political order. State ownership and economic planning were incompatible with this. All planning systems followed ‘the road to serfdom’.

Despite this, after the end of the War, Keynesian economics involving state intervention and planning were the conventional wisdom, until the breakdown of the Bretton Wood system of fixed exchange rates in 1973. Thereafter, neoliberal ideas and monetarism advanced by leaps and bounds until they came to dominate international institutions, government practice and even universities which had been the cradles of Keynesian thinking. Their final victory was marked by the fall of the people’s democracies in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union, which was held to demonstrate that a free market economy was the only viable economy in the modern world.

The Survey conducted by the *Socialist Register 2008* recognises the magnitude of the setbacks suffered by the left in the face of the triumph of the worship of free market forces. Many progressive national and social movements have completely disappeared.

A new opposition to neoliberalism and associated western imperialism has developed none the less. However, the movements associated with this opposition are not necessarily progressive at all.

The two main flashpoints of the struggle at the present time are the Middle East and Latin America. In the former, fundamentalist Islamic movements have emerged which are characterised by negative and reactionary features. Asef Bayat of Leiden, in his contribution, states that Islamism may challenge imperialism but it does not promise the emancipation of the oppressed. He cites, for example, terrorism employed against unveiled women, non-Moslems and Christian Copts in Egypt, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s anti-Israeli rhetoric extending to a denial of the holocaust. Other examples are quoted, along with the viewing of all westerners as ‘non-believers’.

He points out the fact that the USA and other western nations have supported and used Islamic fundamentalism against secular nationalism and left-wing creeds

in Afghanistan and elsewhere. He argues that the question for progressives is not merely to challenge imperialism, but also to work to achieve the emancipation of all on the basis of the universal ideals of justice, inclusion and human dignity.

In Eastern Europe, the struggle against neoliberal governments can take on a totally reactionary character. In a contribution on Hungary, G. M. Tamis, a former Hungarian MP, cites demonstrations against the Socialist/Liberal coalition led by Ferenc Gyurcsany, a former secretary of the Communist Youth League and convert to free market economics, who confessed that his pre-election populist promises were lies. The opposition to him was led by the anti-Communist right with motorcyclists wearing Nazi and Arrow Cross flags. An authentic left has not surfaced, according to this author.

In Latin America, the other principal flashpoint of the struggle against neoliberalism, the situation is different. Here an anti-neoliberal tide has been generated by the poverty, unemployment and degradation suffered by the population and has brought to the fore a number of progressive leaders. Some of these have actually attained power in elections, although not all of these have stood up to the opposition mounted against them by vested interests. William Robinson of California, in his contribution, accuses Luis Ignacio da Silva (Lula) in Brazil; Lucio Gutierrez, elected in 2002 in Ecuador; Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua; and Nestor Kirchner in Argentina of buckling under, to a greater or lesser extent. However, a committed anti-neoliberal bloc which includes Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, Bolivia under Evo Morales, and Ecuador under Rafael Correa, is driving ahead with radical and redistributive reforms. It is, however, too early to be sure about the outcome. This bloc has good relations with socialist Cuba, but is threatened by formidable opposition backed by the USA.

The editors of *Socialist Register 2008* believe that neoliberalism and imperialism are facing accumulating contradictions and argue that the New American Century project for a US world hegemony has run aground. This is the result of the inability of the US to impose its will in Iraq by force of arms. They also recognise that, despite this, neoliberal forces are immensely powerful and their economic momentum has not run out. The current economic crisis is, however, revealing their vulnerability.

The book provides a far reaching study of the world situation. It drives home the sheer injustice and irrationality of the global neoliberal system, which is totally incapable of safeguarding human rights and providing the basic material requirements for a huge under-privileged section of the human race. The enormous wealth of information amassed here serves to spur the reader on to strive the harder for radical change.

However, *Socialist Register 2008* offers no easy guide to the way forward. It recognises the need to find new and better ways of educating the electorate, gaining power and transforming the state, but has little to say about the means of achieving this. Gregory Albo of York University, Toronto, recognises the success of the ruling class in waging 'class struggle from above' to defeat, isolate, individualise and disorganise the Left and the working class movement. He calls

for the development of ‘new collective and democratic organisational capacities to overcome global neoliberalism’ [p.361]. We all hope this can eventually be achieved. In the meantime this volume offers us invaluable food for thought. All socialists will benefit from the study of this wide ranging survey and should be sure to get hold of a copy for this purpose.

Stan Newens

Venezuela – Rekindling Hope

Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power*, Verso, 312 pages, hardback ISBN 9781844670710, £60.00, paperback ISBN 9781844675524, £16.99

One of the most significant breaks in the otherwise all-embracing neo-liberal miasma that envelops the globe must be the events in Venezuela over the last seven years. What is so remarkable is the intensity and breadth of the initiatives taking place, not just about the future of Venezuela but the umbilical relationship between Venezuela and the struggle for a 21st century socialism. Would it not be fitting that, on the continent that saw the first practical implementation of the neo-liberalist agenda, with the hellish economic experimentation of the Chicago School (in Chile after that other 11th of September), that the socio-economic practicalities of its demise should be discerned?

Wilpert gives a succinct description of the main political events and forces in play, with special attention paid to the character, significance and role of Chávez. He points out, given the propensity of the very poor not to vote at all, it was initially middle class support that clinched the election of 1998 for Chávez — a middle class impoverished by the combination of a 20-year slump in oil prices, from the early 1980s onwards, and neo-liberalist economic policies carried out by the political double act of *Acción Democrática* and *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI). The 1994 election of Rafael Caldera as President was the last throw of the dice for the old élite. With the failure of his strategy of IMF loans and accompanying ‘structural adjustment’ policies to return Venezuela to a degree of prosperity, the old élite’s ability to manipulate the system was severely confined. Chávez seized the opportunity and, with his military rooted party, ‘The Movement for the Fifth Republic’ (MVR — more a hurried, cobbled-together electoral machine than a party), plus an alliance of various left-wing political parties, and even a smattering of élite support, romped to victory in the 1998 election.

The central core of the book is a detailed account and analysis of the policies and the progress of the Bolivarian revolution in the varying areas of constitutional, economic, social and foreign policy. These are chapters full of information and are evaluated in the light of Venezuelan history and culture, but also on the practicalities of trying to build a new kind of society. Chávez wanted to signify a

new agenda, a participatory democratic agenda which rooted out the old powers of control. As Wilpert puts it, 'Chávez reformed not just the constitution, but Venezuela's entire polity'. In fact, we have a state which has been reformed, with added presidential powers, but with completely new sources of authority, the 'communal councils' and 'citizen assemblies', workers on the shop floor managing their industry, and even semi-official armed 'local self-defence units' in some of the *barrios*. With the perhaps unexpected sweep of Chávez's early legislative measures, the old ruling élite saw its grip on power lost at many different levels.

After the period of dislocation caused by the 2002 coup and the aftermath of the oil lockout, the Chávez administration was able to greatly improve the living standards of the poor. Surprisingly, on the other hand, the government had pursued, according to Wilpert, a fairly moderate social democratic, economic direction in its relations with private industry. The author brings clarity with detail to many of the social and economic policies of the government and notes both successes and failures. The number of initiatives discussed range over banking reform, micro credit, promoting cooperatives, worker-managed enterprises, endogenous sustainable development, the 're-nationalisation' and reform of the oil industry, tax reform, agricultural reform, and always with insightful comments on the battle for a new kind of participatory democratic economy, together with the empowerment of communities on questions such as education, housing, health, transport and communications.

The rest of the book is devoted, nearly 50 per cent in fact, to an extended discussion of the obstacles to and possibilities for the Venezuelan revolution, and attempts to define what Chávez means by 21st century socialism in the light of the apparent failure of state socialism, market socialism and social democracy. Wilpert as a libertarian socialist believes that in spite of the difficulties, participatory economics is the path towards a socialist Venezuela. His praise, criticism and potential guidance to the Venezuelan and global left is obviously informed by the work of Michael Albert (of Zed Net fame) and his book *Parecon — Life after Capitalism*. Wilpert is an American who lives and works in Venezuela, and runs www.venezuelanalysis.com, a mine of information and comment on the ongoing changes in the country. His book, as he admits, is in part a response to John Holloway's *Changing the World without Taking Power*. In his response, Wilpert restates the case that taking state power, whatever its hazards, is an imperative for socialist advance, and he remains hopeful about developments in Venezuela, but certainly not starry-eyed.

Throughout the chapters analysing Venezuela's economy and society the author raises a number of critical themes and observations. In the final chapter, the criticisms are clarified and brought into context by linking them with both the internal and external obstacles facing the Bolivarian revolution and its impetus towards '21st century socialism'. There is not sufficient space to discuss the external obstacles, but obviously the United States, international capital and the old élite loom large. As to the internal obstacles, the most important, perhaps, are

those related to the Chávisto movement itself. Firstly there is the continuation of the corruption endemic in the old regime, together with patronage and clientelism within the new administration and grassroots organisations; second is the top-down management style possibly aided by the military presence; and finally the problem of what Wilpert calls 'personalism', the centring of political struggle around the figure of Chávez and his adulation being reinforced by government propaganda. Wilpert sees these factors as holding back progress and detaching support, presumably, from the lower middle class, small trades people and waverers within the working class, but he does not make clear their socio-economic status. The failure of the recent referendum goes some way to supporting this thesis as the opposition core vote barely changed: it was the abstentions by Chávez supporters which increased. The more general criticisms stress the contradictions between authoritarian 'top-down management' administrative directives, the increase in presidential power to drive policy changes, and the many directives promoting initiatives to bring participatory democracy at the base, overlapping and failing to follow through, leading to confusion and resulting alienation. The detachment of the educated middle classes from the government has diminished the pool of expert labour available, and preferment has become based on political sympathy rather than expertise. The polarisation of opposition and the underpayment of some officials have undoubtedly led to the 'patronage-clientelism' problem becoming worse. This is complemented by an inadequate appeals machinery and the lack of proper inspection and overview by independent assessors, according to the author. There is machinery already in place to some extent through the Local Public Planning Councils and, as Wilpert states, 'the principle of social auditing is a key element in Venezuela's concept of participatory democracy'. This obviously needs to deepen as a process, which will take time.

For Wilpert there is also the question of Chávez's role. He is a man of undoubted charisma and considerable panache, a physically brave, knowledgeable and wily leader whose empathy with the oppressed of the *barrios* is beyond dispute. Given the Venezuelan, if not Latin American, culture of the *caudillo* or 'strongman' it is perhaps unsurprising that Chavez has to appear the 'big fixer', negotiating his way through the various factions in the alliance, and yet the author fears that government propaganda, whilst not manufacturing a personality cult, over-personalises political campaigning around the figure of Chávez. 'With Chávez everything, without Chávez nothing' is quoted by Wilpert as an exemplar. So much depends on Chávez that his assassination would trigger major problems for the movement; it could 'fall apart' without his unifying presence. Chávez is undoubtedly aware of many of these problems and the other major deformations of clientelism and patronage, which is why he has moved to form a mass political party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Wilpert is hopeful that it will establish proper organised debates over policy, democratically chosen candidates for elected posts (not appointed by the party hierarchy, as at present), and above all a party responsive to its grassroots, which numbers initially a staggering 1.4

million. And, as Chávez says, 'a new party needs new faces', and the revolution 'cannot depend on one person or an élite, rather it must be based on the people'.

The book concludes its assessment of the progress, hopes and prospects of the Venezuela revolution in May 2007, so necessarily it does not touch on the defeated referendum, but more recent developments can be followed on www.venezuelanalysis.com. We can be certain, though, that despite the claims of such opinion formers as *The Economist* (6/12/07) that this is 'the beginning of the end for Hugo Chávez', the revolutionary process will deepen, not falter, if Chávez carries out his promise to 'revise, rectify and reimpulse'.

John Daniels

Why Nato?

Graham Hallett, *European Security in the Post-Soviet Age: The Case against Nato*, 302 pages, William Sessions Ltd, paperback ISBN 0781850723585, £7.99

We know that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was formed after World War Two for the mutual defence of nations bordering the North Atlantic, but where is the enemy now, and are we in danger of mission creep? Afghanistan is a long way from the North Atlantic, and the author of this well researched and carefully written book believes that the 'War on Terror' is already in need of critical review, before we have more self-justifying, but unnecessary, killing fields like Iraq.

Graham Hallett is described on the back cover as a retired lecturer and a former Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In this book he examines not only Nato's history but also, rather like Gore Vidal and Noam Chomsky, the foreign policy of the United States, particularly since 1949. In a table estimating the number of deaths attributable to America's wars since independence, his total for Americans, including those killed in Vietnam, exceeds one million; for America's allies and enemies and their civilians the total is many times larger. But nothing compares with the near 20 million lives lost up to and including World War Two in the territories that became the Soviet Union. The least accountable wars of intervention will remain those in Latin America, which deterred democracy for so long under the banner of anti-communism.

The author is not anti-American: like many of us, he finds much to admire in America, its constitution and its peoples. But in its military history, its foreign policy and its covert operations, he sees the need for greater scrutiny, if only to avoid anti-democratic activity and other errors being repeated.

Three central chapters deal with Europe, Nato and the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. Was it reasonable, legal or necessary to employ 'carpet bombing', 'coercive bombing' and 'punitive bombing' to effect change in Yugoslavia? In 1999, eight of Belgrade's bridges were destroyed by Nato, and much pollution of the Danube was caused by attacks on other targets. In Kosovo, to avoid damage

from ground-based weapons, bombers flew at 15,000 feet, and pilots were not able to distinguish between military or civilian convoys. One such civilian convoy was attacked and destroyed.

President Milosevic had understandably refused the terms of the original Rambouillet proposals, which would have allowed regime change, and given Nato forces indefinite access to every part of Yugoslavia with immunity from Yugoslav law. Notwithstanding the bombing, he continued to refuse to surrender.

Nato's objectives, authority and legitimacy are examined in close detail. Were the 26 members of Nato fully consulted on the use of 32,000 tons of bombs dropped on Yugoslavia and the capital city of a European state? Did they or the United Nations agree to the formation of the largest US military base outside America, Camp Bondsteel, in Kosovo, conveniently situated close to the route of a pipeline stretching from the Caspian to the Adriatic Sea? Did Nato's authority trump that of the United Nations?

Using sources as credible as the International Commission on Kosovo and the UK House of Commons Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees, the author is able to show that much of the information offered in support of 'humanitarian' interventions was unreliable. There was clearly some manipulation in Nato's US links with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), now a 55 member state organisation, which led to the formation of the Kosovo Verification Mission led by a maverick former US Ambassador, William Walker. He employed, among others, 150 US Dyncorp mercenaries who had fought with the Bosnian army against the Bosnian Serbs, and his car carried the flag of the United States. William Walker had claimed that Archbishop Romero was killed in San Salvador by insurgents wearing San Salvador army uniforms, and it is far from clear how his appointment could have been endorsed by the members of Nato or of the OSCE.

Fighting continued in Kosovo between the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslav. It is not made clear who was supplying the KLA and encouraging its ceasefire violations, but the House of Commons Defence Committee is quoted as using language which endorses a 'widespread belief' that the United States was involved. A footnote refers to Noam Chomsky whose sources are usually incontrovertible, and a later reference aligns the International Commission with the notion that not enough action was being taken to constrain the KLA. The evidence for the anticipated 'genocide' used to justify the bombing seems not to have been found, although there were undoubted war crimes, expulsions of Kosovo Albanians, and war casualties of several thousands.

After several months of bombing, including 'Phase3' bombing of 'strategic civilian targets', the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, proposed a halt to allow negotiations. He was supported by Lord Healey, who suggested Russian involvement in negotiations rather than a 'gangster state' controlled by the KLA. By June 1999, Nato was facing the options of withdrawal, escalation of bombing to an 'all-out blitzkrieg', or a ground invasion. Large numbers of B52 bombers

capable of 'carpet bombing' had been flown to bases in Britain.

As Lord Healey had hinted, it was Russian influence which brought the war to an end. A Swedish diplomat, Peter Kastenfeld, succeeded in obtaining Russia's backing for a set of proposals which made five important concessions, as compared with the earlier rejected Rambouillet proposals.

1 Kosovo would be under the control of a UN force (K-For) guided by General Assembly Resolution 1244.

2 Kosovo would remain part of Serbia.

3 Nato troops would not operate throughout Yugoslavia without being subject to Yugoslav law.

4 K-For would include Russian, British, French and American troops.

5 After their replacement by K-For, some units of the Yugoslav army would be allowed to return to protect holy places of the Serbian Orthodox Church and to prevent illegal immigration from Albania.

An agreement was signed on 9 June 1999. British General Sir Mike Jackson was put in command of K-For.

When Yugoslav army units had withdrawn from Kosovo, the United States reneged on sections 4 and 5 of the agreement and refused to accept a Russian role in K-For. In spite of the US requiring the Hungarian government to stop the planned movement of Russian troops through Hungary, a detachment was flown to Pristina Airport. General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), threatened the 'accidental' shooting down of any Russian planes approaching via Romania and, on instructions from Washington, he ordered General Sir Mike Jackson to attack the Russians when they landed at Pristina and to prevent them leaving the airport. Jackson refused to obey saying that the Russian troops were under his command. Clark reminded him that he was the Supreme Allied Commander and Jackson replied 'Sir, I am not starting World War Three for you'. Jackson referred the order to London and it was countermanded by Washington.

Estimates of the cost of the war in Kosovo vary. The material cost of the air war and three years of peacekeeping is estimated at \$97 billion; an estimate which does not include the cost of repairing or replacing buildings in Kosovo. Neither does the estimate include the cost of removing the contamination caused by exploding 30,000 depleted uranium shells – an activity refuted by Tony Blair but eventually conceded by Nato to UN inspectors.

Having provided much interesting detail of one of Nato's most recent interventions, the author goes on to examine larger questions of justification, authority, accountability, legality, success and failure, and criteria for future interventions, including those connected with the 'war on terror'. He discusses, first, the criteria for any war to be seen as a 'just' war, and concludes that 'humanitarian' wars must be founded on reliable evidence and not on hunches about who are the 'good guys' and who are the 'bad guys'. He then examines whether or not the Kosovo action succeeded as a humanitarian intervention, and he has such difficulty in finding in favour that the answer has to be summarised

as a 'no'. Perhaps we are too committed to the notion of leadership, both political and military, with too little regard for the checks and balances needed in the United Kingdom to counter, for example, the misuse of the Royal Prerogative, or the pressures on a president facing impeachment because sperm had been found on a White House intern's dress. We need better procedures before authorising military action in wars of secession. Think only of Northern Ireland. It seems that in Kosovo too many of the initiatives were being taken with too little involvement of the members of both Nato and the OSCE.

The war on terror is where we are now and the author has few doubts that there is already much delusion involved. We do not know how to distinguish between the terrorist and the freedom fighter, and it would be wise to think about that first before using such an expression as 'war', which apparently no longer has to be declared or directed to a particular country.

All of this author's observations are timely and appropriate to the still developing UK-EU-USA-UN relationships. Indeed, it is time to ask, 'what is Nato for?'

Christopher Gifford

NHS concealment

Stewart Player and Colin Leys, *Confuse and Conceal: The NHS and Independent Sector Treatment Centres*, Merlin Press, 128 pages, ISBN 9780850366099, £10.95

This is an excellent and important book which should be widely read. It exposes how a succession of New Labour Health Ministers, advisers, senior civil servants and staff recruited from the private sector operated in the Department of Health to restructure the private health care sector with a network of Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs). Equally important, it chronicles the failure of scrutiny. The House of Commons Health Committee failed to investigate the real aims of the ISTC programme or to challenge the Department of Health when it refused to provide financial information.

The saga of the Independent Sector Treatment Centres is clearly set out in three parts. The first part explains the launch of the ISTC programme and the first wave contracting process, which led to nine private healthcare companies being allocated 1.3m procedures over five years. By June 2007 twenty-four Centres were operational although some in the second wave of the £5.6bn programme may not now proceed.

Independent Sector Treatment Centres were presented primarily as using resources in the private healthcare sector to shorten waiting lists for elective surgery and diagnostic tests and to introduce greater choice. But the underlying aim was also to empower the private sector and to develop an NHS market. At least a quarter of the work carried out by first-wave Centres was not additional

work but 'transferred activity' which would otherwise have been carried out by the NHS.

Since the book was published, more evidence has emerged to support the Player and Leys analysis. Department of Health figures for Phase 1 Independent Sector Treatment Centres show that only four centres were working at 100% of the value of the contract and four had under 60% contract utilisation (end September 2007). Yet these Centres were given guaranteed contracts requiring the government to pay the full cost irrespective of how many patients are treated.

The second part examines the House of Commons Health Committee's investigation of Independent Sector Treatment Centres in 2006. This highlights many important issues, at least four with wider relevance.

Firstly, New Labour's public sector transformation strategy requires the mainstreaming of commissioning and the creation of contestable markets. The Independent Sector Treatment Centres programme highlights the sham of devolution and local control. Primary Care Trusts ostensibly contracted with ISTCs but the programme was centrally controlled. Democratic accountability has been virtually non-existent.

Secondly, the use of 'commercial confidentiality' to block disclosure of financial and performance information severely limits the degree of scrutiny. 'Commercial confidentiality' is widely used to limit the transparency of Public Private Partnerships and will become commonplace as commissioning leads to more outsourcing. So how can there be any meaningful 'community engagement' if the public, community organisations and trade unions are denied access to information on policies and performance?

Thirdly, it demonstrates that key performance indicators (KPIs), value for money and quality and contract monitoring will be marginalised by the market making activities and partnership with private health care companies. Most of the key performance indicators were process and not outcome indicators. It appears that there was never any attempt to assess the impact of the Independent Sector Treatment Centres programme other than the extent to which it contributed to the development of an NHS market.

Finally, the ISTC programme is classic 'partnership' in which public service principles and values are made subservient to commercial interests.

There is only one criticism of the book under review. The analysis of the development of the NHS market in Chapter 3 would have benefited from placing it in the context of what is happening across the public sector. Player and Leys do an excellent job in showing how Health Ministers and the Department of Health planned to marketise health care and the extent to which they will go to manipulate and conceal the real use of public assets and resources. Other government departments, local authorities and public bodies are undertaking similar market-making strategies in the rest of the public sector and welfare state. Sector studies, for example in health, education, housing and criminal justice play a key role in building an evidence base. However, there is an obligation to set each of these studies in the wider context so that common impacts can be identified,

lessons learnt and alternative policies and strategies devised.

Those who believed that there would be a change of policy under Brown have been proved right – the drive to marketisation and privatisation has intensified! The words ‘lies’ and ‘deceit’ would be more accurate in the title of the book, reflecting the depths to which markets and neoliberal ideology drive political ambition and greed.

Dexter Whitfield

Official Lies

George Monbiot, *Bring on the Apocalypse: Six Arguments for Global Justice*, Atlantic Books for The Guardian, 242 pages, ISBN 9781843546566, £11.99

This is a selection of George Monbiot’s *Guardian* articles published between 2003 and 2007. It is an invaluable source of evidence, with detailed references, for all the disputed issues – Saddam Hussein’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, cluster bombs, arms sales, Palestine, religious fundamentalism, the use of torture, carbon dioxide emissions, extending airports, genetically modified crops, teenage pregnancies, private finance initiatives, taxing the rich, aiding the poor, health and safety at work, second homes, and much else. What is most striking in Monbiot’s revelations is the extent to which the public have been told lies in these matters, deliberate lies, which were known to be lies – by the government, by the big corporations, by the press and media.

Everyone now knows that Blair lied about Saddam Hussein’s weapons, that reports were not just ‘sexed up’ but rewritten to tell a different story which supported Government policy. Saddam Hussein is, moreover, generally claimed to have expelled the weapons inspectors, to have trained and armed Al Qaeda, and spread anthrax in the United States. And many newspapers went on carrying these stories when none of them was true. The Ministry of Defence lied in denying the use of white phosphorous fire bombs in Falluja. The employment of torture with prisoners of war and the British role in ‘rendition’ of prisoners to countries where torture is practised were all denied until the truth was leaked out. Rising carbon dioxide levels from motor transport, and most particularly from air transport, have been continually pooh-poohed in Government statements. As Claud Cockburn once wrote, ‘Never believe anything until it has been officially denied’.

Many of the matters which Monbiot deals with are of desperate importance for human survival. The most serious is, of course, the threat of climate change from the rising levels of carbon dioxide. The trouble here is the mathematics. It is widely agreed by scientists that a rise of two degrees centigrade of global warming is the maximum permissible for stabilisation without major irreversible disaster for the planet. That implies a maximum of 450 parts per million of green house gases in the atmosphere, and this is the target which the British Government says it has set. But that is not true. The target includes only carbon dioxide and not any

of the other greenhouse gases, especially those emitted by aeroplanes. The most recent scientific studies, moreover, suggest a lower target per head may be necessary as populations increase. Gordon Brown proposes raising the air passenger duty from £5 to £10 per head, which only reverses the cut he made in 2001. Meanwhile, airport capacity in the United Kingdom is to be doubled in the next decade, and believe it or not, aircraft emissions are not included in the Government's target. How are we supposed to trust what we are told, when such concealment of the true facts is taking place?

Reneging on promises can be seen as a form of lying. New Labour has a remarkable record in this respect. Government support for 'Make Poverty History', including speeches from Blair, Brown and Benn, promised reduction of debts and increased aid especially for the poorest African countries. This has simply not happened, and more aid has been tied to concessions to the big mining and oil corporations. Measures promised by Gordon Brown to control tax evasion by the super rich have not been introduced, and the gap in income and wealth between the rich and the poor is wider than under the Tories. Charges of corporate manslaughter, promised repeatedly by Blair himself, to bring to book the responsible directors of big companies, as in the case of rail disasters, have been repeatedly postponed and finally changed to a voluntary arrangement. The number of available hospital beds, which we were told would be increased, fell after 1997 by 12,500 in England and by 5,000 in Scotland. It is a sad story wherever Monbiot looks.

Don't read this book, if you want something to cheer you up.

Michael Barratt Brown

The Union's Scots Crisis

Christopher A. Whatley, Derek J. Patrick, *The Scots and the Union*, Edinburgh University Press, 440 pages, hardback ISBN 9780748616855, £25.99

As I sit down to write this review, the Scottish newspapers are full of the Union between Scotland and England. Our Scottish Government has already initiated a series of conversations from which it wishes to proceed to a multi-option referendum encompassing the status quo, enhanced powers for the Scottish Parliament, and the nationalists' goal of independence for Scotland. The aim of the conversations is to provide details of the three alternatives in order that the electorate can have an informed opinion on the subject.

Hard though Gordon Brown has tried, nowhere in these newspaper reports can I find the words 'British' or 'Britain' used. The term 'United Kingdom', as in 'UK government' appears because, on this same day, Jack Straw has laboured hard and produced a mouse of a report into the future constitution of that land we fondly refer to here as the 'Yookay'. But more on that later.

For, as if two initiatives on the same topic would normally be considered enough fare for any political day, the opposition in the Scottish Parliament has announced the belated formation of what they call a 'Commission' (Gordon Brown prefers the term 'review') to look into the working of devolution ten years after the Act to establish devolved government in Scotland.

The Commission has been set up by the Tories, Liberal Democrats and New Labour. It is embarrassing for the latter Party in that, after making the announcement earlier this year, they had to go to Westminster to get permission to do so. But now we have it. It can discuss anything but independence. Or, as the chairman, Sir Kenneth Calman, Chancellor of Glasgow University and former Chief Medical Officer, said at the Commission's launch, 'Independence is not relevant'. As in all good pantomimes, the audience of journalists couldn't resist participating, and a cry of 'OH, YES IT IS!' filled the room. Welcome to street politics, Scottish style, Sir Kenny. Was it ever thus?

The Scots and the Union is refreshing on this 300-year-old topic. Chris Whatley and a team of researchers have scoured the archives both official and of the great families of the period, a task of no small measure, to reveal a fresh take on the motivations of those playing the leading roles in this drama and how their judgement was affected by churches, monarchs (both here and across the water) and, of course, street politics.

Three hundred years on, the reports on these contemporary political events lead with the possibility that the Act of Settlement, which bans Catholics from becoming monarch, could be abolished. That this should be chosen as the lead issue must be perplexing to non-Scots looking on and, possibly, to indigenous Scots who have been ignoring the issue in the hope that it would go away. Why this issue, one may ask? Well, at the beginning of the 18th Century, the issue of succession was a make or break issue between Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopalian England on the one hand, and the popery of the Stuarts on the other. Scotland had just passed through what became known as the killing times when covenanter and Episcopalian were literally at each other's throat.

As for the Scottish economy, in an age of imperial rivalry and mercantilism, the lack of military and naval power hampered Scotland's colonialist adventures, a state of affairs that came to a head with the Darien disaster, in 1698, when an attempt to set up a Scottish trading post in Panama failed with the loss of the majority of Scotland's investment capital. Add to this three years of failed harvests, with an accompanying population decline of 13.5 per cent, and the scene is set for the lead up to the 1707 Treaty of Union.

Whatley spends some time establishing the shifting allegiances that lead to the successful vote on the Union on 1st May that year, arguing that the more common view that the parliamentarians were 'bought and sold for English gold', as expressed in Burns' song 'Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!', was not the whole story. Yet he does remind the reader of the amount of effort that went in to negotiating the 'Equivalence', the compensation given to the Scottish Establishment for its losses from Darien, and of the preparations of the Lords and

gentry, with their bags packed, ready to dash to London as soon as the Treaty was signed so as to avoid missing out on the possibility of preferment under the new regime. So it goes.

The interwoven complexities within Scottish society which led up to that vote are covered in detail, but one has to be mindful of the sources for this study. Much of it is based on correspondence between the participants, the élite in Scottish society, but on occasions Whatley points to other elements whose ideas break through in to public cognisance. For instance, Whatley states that 'Union opposition had a plebeian character with Presbyterian ministers concerned with the attitudes of the poor'. This is further elaborated with the statement that the 'Covenanters introduced a radical, sometimes egalitarian and highly effective system of public finance' and that 'landowners should support the poor' with 'day to day relief in the hands of the church'. Radical grassroots thinking also emerged in Presbyterian tracts against the Union, calling for rejection of the monarchy, hereditary offices and most taxes, and the establishment of a commonwealth confirming a link between Scottish Presbyterianism and social levelling.

There is little doubt that the signing of the Treaty did not end the controversy of the relationship between Scotland and England. Open rebellions occurred in 1715 and 1745, with the attempts of the Stuarts to regain the throne. A further complexity in the web that was woven around the settlement is that Jacobites were found on both sides of the Union debate. However, their leader, without doubt, had his eyes firmly fixed on being king of a United Kingdom, and a plea of 'trust me', as a Stuart, to give you freedom of worship, seen by some as worthy of support, was rejected in the end at Culloden, which was not a battle between Scots and English, but between Jacobite Catholics and Redcoats whose make-up included many Scottish recruits, even from before the Union. Daniel Defoe, who operated as a Union spy, had earlier written that 'Scotland would do better selling goods rather than men's services in other armies, a sure sign of the supplier nation's poverty'.

(A digression: The National Trust of Scotland recently called for descendents of those who fought at Culloden to join in celebrations at the opening of a new visitors' centre. They could find Jacobites scattered worldwide but, try as they may, failed to find one person confessing to be Scottish Redcoat.)

To return to the issue of the Act of Settlement and why it should surface on day one of our contemporary debate on the Union, it was certainly a major element in the debates surrounding 1707. Accompanying this Act was the Act of Security, which made those accepting public office kneel before the altar. In Scotland this was seen as a popish posture; the presence of Bishops in the House of Lords as a condoning of prelacy. Is this relevant to today's debate? Perhaps it is, when our political leaders start to talk of oaths of citizenship and participate in oaths to the monarch. Lord Roxburgh, when asked at the time to comment on support for the Act of Union, is quoted as having said 'Trade with most, Hanover with some and ease and security with others'.

It was strange, indeed, to read the letters columns in the Scottish press on the

day following the most recent contemporary announcements. All the old arguments surfaced, as if 300 years hadn't passed, which left me with the question why, since in 1707 secular ambition took precedence over religious rectitude, did we still carry that baggage with us? Our Leveller forbears lit a spark soon doused by church leaders in hock to the wealthy and powerful. How like our 21st century political élite. Surely it is time for us to establish a secular republic, or would that idea now, as then, be looked on as the crazed musings of a 'fanatick'?

Henry McCubbin

Popular Planning Now

Ken Coates (Editor), *The Right to Useful Work*, first published 1978, reprinted 2007, Spokesman, 288 pages, ISBN9780851247441, £12

Industrial relations, i.e. the ways in which immediate class struggles between capital and labour are envisaged by capitalist management, as well as institutionalised trade unions, constitute a very specific, and especially relevant, case of the old *problematique* of the ambiguous relation between grassroots movements and state power. On the one hand, as everybody knows, industrial relations, and most specifically relations on the shop-floor, still are, in many ways, out of reach of state power. Formally constituted as the 'private sphere' of capitalist employers, the entire process of capitalist exploitation seems to be difficult to access for political regulation: neither legal norms nor the 'monopoly of legitimate violence' seems to prevail in the ways that are claimed to be characteristic of the modern state. Even the Fordist system of corporatist political regulation has been limited to a kind of secondary access to the field: there are, in fact, tripartite processes of fixing rules regulating the legal and bargaining procedures concerning conflicts arising out of labour relations, but they do not seem to be able to shape those labour relations themselves. Take, for example, the historical 'normalization' of the working day: statutory regulation – as well as negotiated conventions between employers' organizations and trade unions – have not directly changed the situation on the shop-floor by defining the conditions of entering and leaving it. They have not even had a direct impact on the development of average effective working time. Their real impact lies in the development of effective wages, that is, by defining the proportion of normally paid working time to overtime.

Classical socialist thought has defined a perspective under which it was effectively possible to overcome this situation that is so structurally bound up with the basic relation of our economies and societies, the wage relation. That is by overcoming this wage-relation itself, in a process of socialist transition – thereby eliminating one of those uncontrollable antagonists, the capitalists, and making the other one, the workers, amenable to political control by organizing them into a self-regulating collective body. The capitalist answer to this classical socialist

attempt has been the regulation of the labour movement, while maintaining the despotic liberty of capital to shape 'its own private sphere' – under different political forms, ranging from fascist compulsory regulation, via the 'New Deal' politics of trade union consent, to outright forms of democratic tripartism, as in the Austrian case.

The ecological crisis – as we gradually came to know it during the 1970s – has provided us with a new approach to the same problem. Controlling the ways of handling and transforming materials within the processes of primary production, secondary production (i.e. production involving productive consumption of produced goods) and mass consumption (with its characteristic locus, the private household, similarly 'out of bounds' for the controlling attempts of state power) has turned out to be the effective centrepiece of any conceivable strategy of ecological conversion. And this is just the other side of the same coin as the control of the effective conditions of work.

Among the early ecologists, most of them quite removed from the realm of industrial production, although far less so from the respective area of urban mass consumption, some consideration has been given to a seductive proposal of how to cope with the problem: to stop industrial, large scale production as a whole, and to go back to handicraft ways of producing (William Morris), far more amenable to political and social control than the ways of modern 'industrialism'. Less ambitious proposals have proposed a 'dualist' strategy: giving up any ambition of transforming those industrial production processes that turn out to be irreplaceable, and developing a 'second sector' of production on a more human, artisan scale, as the basis for an expanding 'convivial society'.

Both projects have one central flaw, aside from the questions of political realism they immediately provoke. They utterly neglect the very possibility of changing the concrete ways of industrial production by the active intervention of productive workers themselves (or of changing the ways of mass consumption by the active intervention of housewives as the foremost bearers of domestic production processes).

This is the very point addressed by the initiatives and debates on 'popular planning' that are documented and discussed in this volume which has aptly been re-printed now. In a historical moment when the Hayekian thesis that any political meddling with the economy is irrational, bound to lead to catastrophes and totalitarianism, it reminds us of three elementary facts.

One, that popular planning is not just another extension of the de-politicized administration management instances (and bureaucracies) are constantly trying to apply to the everyday class struggles at the point of (capitalist) production – it rather has to be understood as a co-ordinated effort from below to reclaim the equal liberty of each and every one to be heard and to be respected in their 'equal liberty', i.e. in the side-stepping and resisting all effects of established structures of domination.

Two, that popular planning cannot be restricted to the constituted 'public sphere' of the local or regional state, it has to extend, if it is in any way seriously

aiming at its declared objectives, also to the ‘private spheres’ of the firm (*factory* or *office*), as well as of the household (in so far as they are still effective arenas of domination to be called into question by any real ‘politics from below’).

Three, that popular planning, in order to address the real needs of people, cannot restrict itself to improving the capitalist rationality of good use value for a good price, that is, of satisfying needs in the cheapest available way. It rather has to address the deeper questions of sustainability and sufficiency, by raising the issues of ecological acceptability and social usefulness alongside the question of economic feasibility and efficiency.

The very energy and dynamics of liberation struggles within production and consumption may thereby transform themselves into a source for broadening the scope and support for an emancipatory type of popular planning – by taking on board not only the narrow perspectives of capitalist accumulation and the individual reproduction of labour power as the commodity in the hands of the workforce, but also the broader perspective of real human beings living within historical political ecologies that relate to the terrestrial bio-sphere and embedded in a gendered cultural (and biological) reproduction process of their very lives. As the domination of the capitalist mode of production does not allow this to happen, struggling for such an inclusive way of popular planning means fighting against this domination – and in the degree to which such struggles succeed in reaching out to capitalist production processes, they begin to present a major challenge to this domination.

Such a perspective as that embodied by the authors of this book – before the neo-liberal counter-revolution seemingly swept them away – would today certainly involve a major conflict of powers within society. But such a conception of transformatory popular planning at the points of investment, production, and consumption – the determined way of life under the criteria of ecology, feminism and anti-racism – would not presuppose a seizure of power, as in traditional socialist strategy, with the implied amount of statism. ‘Empowering the powerless’ would necessarily be one of the central aims, and hopefully, also, of the central effects, of the whole process. But it would not constitute its utopian starting precondition. Which means that we can start with it again here and now, wherever we stand.

Frieder Otto Wolf

Artery Poet

Bob Dixon, *Make Capitalism History: Poems and Other Communications*, Artery Publications, 116 pages, ISBN 9780953396511, £4.50

It is sometimes said that ‘you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover’, but here is an exception to that rule. The striking red, white and black jacket of *Make Capitalism History: Poems and Other Communications* by Bob Dixon immediately grabbed

my attention and made me want to read it. Once inside, I was not to be disappointed. This is a collection of thought-provoking anarchist poetry and prose that will capture the imagination of anyone who likes to think outside the 'Capitalist' box. It is thoroughly appealing from cover to cover.

Abi Rhodes

Available from Artery Publications, 38 Pembroke Road, Bromley, Kent, BR1 2RU, (price £5.25, postage included, cheques payable to R. T. Dixon)

Space for Peace

Bruce K. Gagnon, *Come Together Right Now: Organising Stories from a Fading Empire*, Just Write Books, 248 pages, ISBN 097665335451795, \$17.95

Since he got out of the US Air Force, in 1974, Bruce Gagnon has wanted 'to serve in a way I promised myself I would' whilst in there. He subsequently worked with the United Farm Workers' Union, which taught him how to organise. Active in the peace movement in Florida during the 1980s and 1990s, he became increasingly aware of the United States' plans 'to move the arms race into the heavens'. In 1992, the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space was formed. Bruce became the public face of the Global Network and, since 1999, has been on the road 'to help create a global constituency to protect space from becoming the next battleground'.

These are the stories of his travels, throughout the United States as well as in Europe, Australia and more widely. In October 2002, Bruce Gagnon came to the Global Network's stronghold of Yorkshire during Keep Space For Peace Week, an annual event sponsored by the Network. Yorkshire CND pulled out all the stops, and Leeds University was packed to hear the two Bruces (B. Kent also in attendance). Since that time, the United Kingdom's role in US planning for star wars has grown appreciably, centred on the installations at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill in North Yorkshire. Tony Blair even offered to host US interceptor missiles there. But President Bush has found locations closer to the Russian nuclear forces, which are the real target of these emplacements.

Nevertheless, Yorkshire is the home to key elements of the star wars architecture. It is therefore fitting that the Global Network's website (www.space4peace.org) is hosted from there by Dave Webb, who has spelt out the actual role of these installations to readers of *The Spokesman* (see no. 70). That website and this book tell us much about what is really happening in our world.

Tony Simpson